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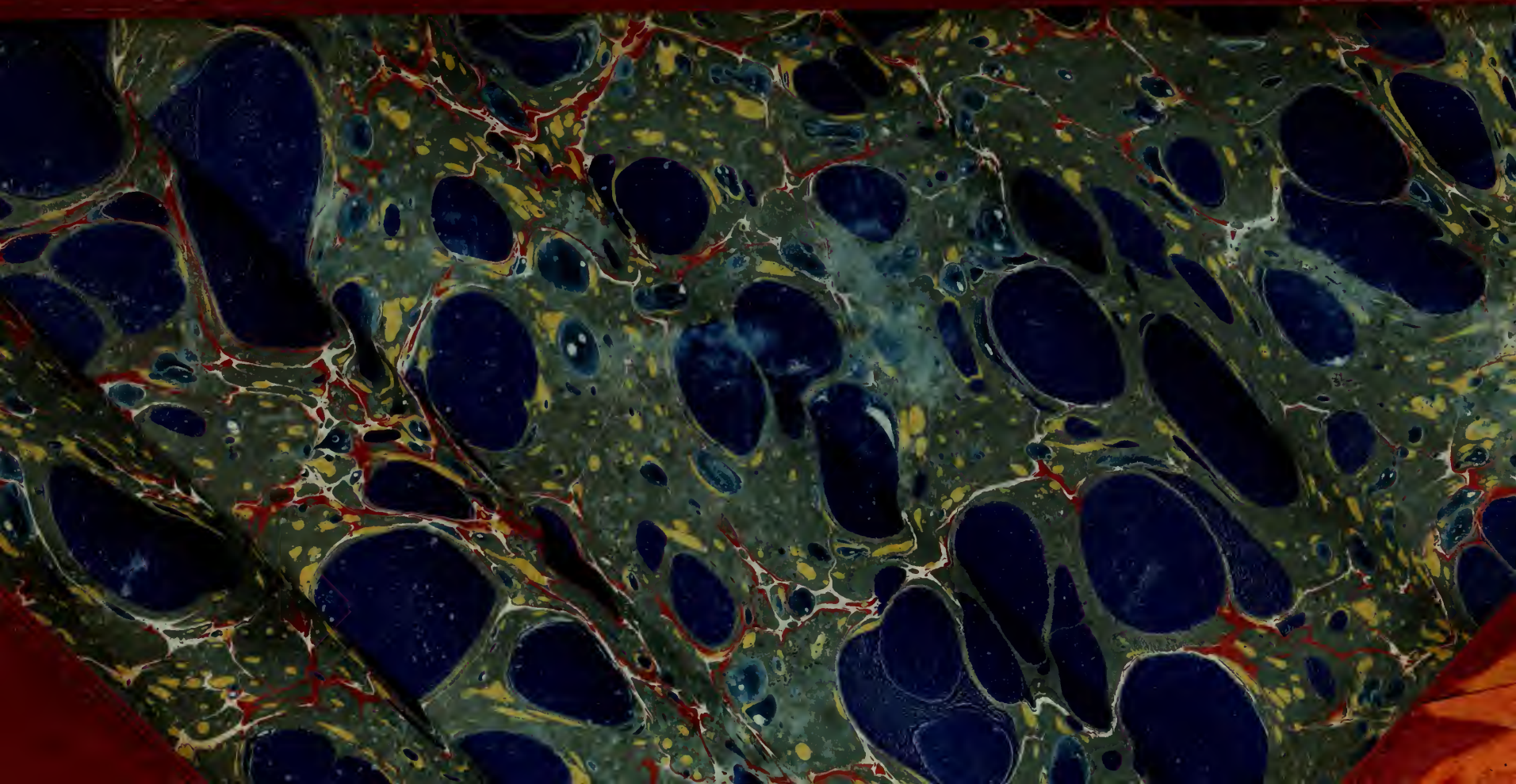

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M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

SHE GLIDED OUT AND STOOD BEFORE THE SERVANTS, ARRESTING THEIR PROGRESS AS SHE HAD ARRESTED MINE.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME XLVI.

July to December, 1888.

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"She glided out and stood before the servants."
"Charley, such a curious thing happened this morning."
"She paused to look at me; a searching, doubtful look."
"If ever I saw Hatch in my life, that is Hatch!"
"At that moment Mrs. Lennard came in."
"We were taking tea out of doors."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIX.

ANNABEL.

MOST men have their romance in life sooner or later. Mine had come in due course, and she who made it for me was Annabel Brightman.

After my first meeting with her, when she was a child of fourteen, and I not much more than a lad of twenty, I had continued to see her from time to time, for Mr. Brightman's first invitation to me was but the prelude to others. I watched her grow up into a good, unaffected woman, lovable and charming as she was when a child. Childhood had passed away now, and thought and gentleness had taken its place; and to my eyes and my heart no other girl in the world could compare with Annabel Brightman.

Her father suspected it. Had he lived only a little longer he would have learned it beyond doubt, for I should have spoken out more fully upon the matter.

A little less than a year before his death—it was on a Good Friday—I was spending the day at his house, and was in the garden with Annabel. She had taken my arm, and we were pacing the broad walk to the left of the lawn, thinking only of ourselves, when raising my eyes I saw Mr. Brightman looking attentively at us from one of the French windows. He beckoned to me, and I went in.

"Charles," said he, when I had stepped inside, "no *nonsense*. You and Annabel are too young for anything of that sort."

I felt that his eyes were full upon me as I stood before him, and my face flushed to the roots of my hair. But I took courage to ask a question.

"Sir, every year passing over our heads will lessen that objection. Would there be any other?"

"Be quiet, Charles. Time enough to talk of these things when the years shall have passed. You are too young for them, I say."

"I am twenty-five, sir; and Miss Brightman——"

"Twenty-five?" he interrupted. "I was past forty when I thought of marriage. You must not turn Annabel's head with visions of what the years may bring forth, for if you do I will not have you here. Leave that to the future."

But there was sufficient in Mr. Brightman's manner to prove that he had not been blind to the attachment springing up between us; and undoubtedly regarded me as the possible future husband of his daughter. At any rate he continued to invite me to his house. During the past year Annabel had been a great deal at Hastings with Miss Brightman; I wondered that her father and mother would spare her so much.

But Annabel knew nothing of that conversation, and I had never yet spoken of love to her. And now Mr. Brightman, who would, or at least might, have sanctioned it, was gone; and Mrs. Brightman, who would certainly, as I believed, oppose it, remained.

In the days immediately following Mr. Brightman's death, I was literally overwhelmed with business. Apart from the additional work that naturally fell upon me—his share as well as mine—no end of clients came pouring in; and for no earthly purpose, that I could see, excepting curiosity. Besides this, there was the frightful search for Sir Ralph Clavering's will, and the anxiety its loss entailed on me.

On the Wednesday afternoon, just as I had got rid of two clients, Lennard came up with the news that someone else was there. I was then in the front room, seated at Mr. Brightman's desk. Too impatient to hear Lennard out, I told him I could see no one; could not, and would not.

"It is Miss Annabel Brightman," rejoined Lennard quietly.

"Miss Annabel Brightman? Oh, that's very different; I will see her."

Annabel came in, throwing back her crape veil. She had driven up alone in the carriage to bring me a message from her mother. Mrs. Brightman had made an appointment with me for that evening at her house; she had now sent to tell me not to keep it, as she was not well enough to attend to business.

"Mamma wishes you to come to-morrow instead of to-day; early in the afternoon," added Annabel.

That would be impossible, and I said so; my engagements would not at present permit me to give up an afternoon.

"Perhaps to-morrow evening will do," I suggested. "In fact it must do, Annabel. I don't know when I shall have leisure to come down to you in the daytime."

"I daresay it will do," assented Annabel. "At any rate, you can come to us. If mamma is not able to enter into business matters, another time can be appointed."

"Is your mamma so very ill?"

"Sometimes I think so—but she fluctuates," replied Annabel.

"She is extremely weak, and her spirits are depressed. She will pass whole hours shut up in her room in solitude. When I ask to go in, Hatch brings out a message that mamma is not able to see even me."

"Her illness must be on the nerves."

"I suppose so. Yesterday she came down and walked with me in the garden in the sunshine. She seemed pretty well then, but not strong. In the evening she shut herself up again."

"I wish you would sit down, Annabel," I said, offering her a chair for the third time.

"I would if I could stay. Mamma charged me to go straight back after leaving the message with you.—Are you well?" she continued with hesitation. "You look harassed."

"I am well, Annabel. But you have used the right word—I am harassed; terribly so."

"Poor papa!" she sighed. "It has brought a world of work and care upon you, as well as of grief to us."

"I should not mind work. But—we have had another loss, Annabel. A loss as mysterious as that of the gold; and far more important."

"What is it?" she asked. "More money?"

"No; I wish it were. A will, deposited in the safe there, has disappeared. I cannot even guess at the consequences; ruin probably to me, and to one of our best clients. Not only that. If things are to vanish so unaccountably from our strongholds, we must have an enemy at work, and it is impossible to foresee where it may end."

"How very strange! What was the will like? I mean what did it look like? I have a reason for asking you."

"It was a folded parchment. You saw your father's will, Annabel: it looked very much like that. Why do you ask?"

"Because I remember papa's bringing home a parchment, exactly like the one you describe. It was an evening or two before he died: the evening before I and mamma went to Hastings. We left on Saturday, so it must have been Friday. Do you think it could be the missing will?"

"Oh, no. I have known Mr. Brightman—though very rarely—take home deeds which required studying; but he was not likely to take home Sir Ralph Clavering's will. He made it himself, and knew every word it contained. Annabel, I did not intend to let out the name, but it will be safe with you."

"Perfectly so; as safe as with yourself. I will not repeat it, even to mamma."

"And what I shall do I cannot tell," I concluded, as I attended her down to the carriage. "I would give every shilling I possess to find it."

More work, and then the afternoon came to an end, my dinner came up, and I was at liberty to enjoy a little rest. I had taken to

the front room as my sitting-room, and should speedily remove the desk and iron safe into the other, making that exclusively a business room, and seeing clients in it. After dinner, the fire clear, my reading-lamp lighted, I took up the newspaper. But for habits of order and self-denying rules, I should never have attained to the position I enjoyed. One of those rules was, never to read the *Times* or any work of relaxation until my work was over for the day. I could then enjoy my paper and my cigar, and feel that I had earned both.

I took up the *Times*, and almost the very first paragraph my eye fell upon was the following:

"We hear that the convict ship *Vengeance*, after encountering stormy weather and contrary winds on her passage out, has been wrecked upon an uninhabited island. It is said that some of the convicts have escaped."

I started up almost as if I had been shot. Tom Heriot had gone out in the *Vengeance:* was he one of those who had escaped? If so, where was he? and what would be his ultimate fate?

The ship had sailed from our shores in August; this was February: therefore the reader may think that the news had been long enough in reaching England. But it must be remembered that sailing vessels were at the mercy of the winds and waves, and in those days telegrams and cablegrams had not been invented.

Throwing my cigar into the fire and the newspaper on the table, I fell into an unpleasant reverie. My lucky star did not seem in the ascendant just now. Mr. Brightman's unhappy death; this fresh uncertainty about Tom Heriot; the certain loss of the gold and the disappearance of the will ——

A ring at the visitors' bell aroused me. I listened, as Leah opened the door, curious to know who could be coming after office hours, unless it was Sir Edmund Clavering. Lake was in the country.

"Is Mr. Strange in, Leah?" And the sound of the sweet voice set my heart beating.

"Yes, Miss Brightman. Please go up."

A light foot on the stairs, and Annabel entered, holding up a parchment with its endorsement towards me. "Will of Sir Ralph Clavering."

"Oh, Annabel! you are my guardian angel!"

I seized the deed and her hands together. She smiled, and drew away the latter.

"I still thought the parchment I spoke of might be the missing one," she explained, "and when I got home I looked in papa's secretaire. There it was."

"And you have come back to bring it to me!"

"Of course I have. It would have been cruel to let you pass another night of suspense. I came as soon as I had dined."

"Who is with you?"

"No one; I came in by the omnibus. In two omnibuses really, for the first one only brought me as far as Charing Cross."

"You came in by omnibus! And alone?"

"Why not? Who was to know me, or what could harm me? I kept my veil down. I would not order the carriage out again. It might have disturbed mamma, and she is in bed with one of her worst headaches. And now, Charles, I must hasten back again."

"Wait one moment, Annabel, whilst I lock up this doubly-precious will."

"Why? You are not going to trouble yourself to accompany me, when you are so busy? It is not in the least necessary. I shall return home just as safely as I came here."

"You silly child! That you have come here at night and alone, I cannot help; but what would Mrs. Brightman say to me if I suffered you to go back in the same manner?"

"I suppose it was not quite right," she returned, laughingly; "but I only thought of the pleasure of restoring the will."

I locked it up in the safe, and went downstairs with her. Why Mr. Brightman should have taken the will home puzzled me considerably; but the relief to my mind was inexpressible, and I felt quite a gush of remorse towards Lady Clavering for having unjustly suspected her.

The prosy old omnibus, as it sped on its way to Clapham, was to me as an Elysian chariot. And we had it to ourselves the whole way, but never a word passed between us that might not have been spoken before a committee of dowagers. In fact, we talked chiefly of Miss Brightman. I began it by asking how she was.

"Aunt Lucy is very delicate indeed" replied Annabel. "Papa's death has tried her greatly: and anything that tries her at once affects her chest. She says she shall not be able to risk another winter in England, even at Hastings."

"Where would she go?"

"To Madeira. At least, she thinks so now. In a letter mamma received from her yesterday, Aunt Lucy said she should go there in the autumn."

"She will find it very dull and lonely—all by herself."

"Yes," sighed Annabel. "Mamma said she should send me with her. But of course I could not go—and leave mamma. I wish I had a sister! One of us might then accompany Aunt Lucy, and the other remain at home. What do you think that stupid Hatch said?" cried Annabel, running on. "We were talking about it at lunch, and Hatch was in the room. 'It's just the best thing you can do, Miss Annabel, to go with your aunt,' she declared, following up mamma's remark."

"Perhaps Mrs. Brightman may take it into her head to go to Madeira also?"

Annabel made a movement of dissent. "No, I don't think she

would do that, Charles. She and Aunt Lucy used to be the very best of friends, but lately there has been some coolness between them. The reason is not known to me, but I fancy Hatch knows it."

"Hatch seems to be quite a confidential attendant on your mamma."

"Oh, yes, she is so. She has lived with us so long, you see; and mamma, when she was Miss Chantry, knew Hatch when she was quite a child. They both come from the same place—near Malvern, in Worcestershire. Aunt Lucy and mamma were intimate in early days, and it was through that intimacy that papa first knew Miss Chantry. Why she and Aunt Lucy should have grown cool to one another now, I cannot tell; but they have done so—and oh, I am sorry for it. I love Aunt Lucy very, very much," added the girl, enthusiastically.

"And I'm sure I love the name—Lucy," I said, laughing. "It was my mother's."

The evening was yet early when we reached Mrs. Brightman's, for eight o'clock was striking. Hatch, in her new mourning, came stealing down the stairs with a quiet footfall, her black cap-strings flying as usual.

"Why, Miss Annabel, where have you been?" she cried. "I couldn't *imagine* what had become of you."

"I had to go out, Hatch—to take a deed to the office that poor papa had brought home and left here. Why? Has mamma wanted me?"

"Not she," returned Hatch. "She has just dropped off into a doze, and I am trying to keep the house free from noise. I thought you had been spirited away, Miss Annabel, and that's the truth."

"Mrs. Brightman has one of her bad headaches?" I remarked.

Hatch looked at me; then quickly at her young mistress: as much as to say: "You've been telling him that, Miss Annabel."

"It is that bad to-night, Mr. Charles, that her temples is fit to split," she answered. "Since master's death she have had 'em a'most constant—and no wonder, with all the worry and the shock it brought her. Are you going already, sir?"

"Will you not stay for tea?" asked Annabel.

"Not to-night, thank you," I replied.

"I'll let you out quietly," said Hatch, advancing towards the hall door. "And mind, Miss Annabel, you are not to go anigh your mamma's room to waken her," she added, looking back dictatorially. "When one is racked with pain, body and mind, sleep is more precious than gold."

Hatch had lived there during the whole of Annabel's life, and could not always lay aside the authoritative manner she had exercised towards the child; possibly did not try to do so.

Great sway was held by Hatch in the household, and Mrs. Brightman appeared to sanction it. Certainly she never in any way inter-

fered with it. But Hatch, always kindly, was a favourite with the servants.

With her shrewdness, capability and strong sense, it seemed a marvel that she should not have improved in manners and in her way of speaking. But she remained very much the same rough diamond that she had always been. Strangers were wont to feel surprise that Mrs. Brightman, herself so refined a woman, should put up with Hatch as her personal attendant; and in her attacks of illness Hatch would be in her mistress's room for hours together. At this time I knew nothing of Hatch's antecedents, very little of Mrs. Brightman's; or of matters relating to the past; and when circumstances brought me into Hatch's confidence, she enlightened me upon some points of the family history. A few of her communications I cannot do better than insert here, improving somewhat upon her parts of speech.

I recall the scene now. It was a lovely moonlit evening, not long after the time of which I am writing. I had gone to Clapham to inquire after Mrs. Brightman, who was then seriously ill, and kept her chamber. Strolling about the garden in the soft twilight, wishing Annabel was at home instead of at Hastings, Hatch came out and joined me, and at once fell to chatting without ceremony. I made a remark, quite by chance, that touched upon the subject of Mrs. Brightman's early life; it was immediately taken up by Hatch and enlarged upon. I heard much to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

"Colonel Chantry and his wife, who was the daughter of Lord Onyx, lived at their seat, Chantry Hall, a beautiful place not far from Malvern in Worcestershire. They had three children—George, Frederic and Emma, who were reared in all the pride and pomp of the Chantry family. The property was strictly entailed. It would descend to George Chantry at his father's death; and as Colonel Chantry had no other property whatever, and as he lived not only up to his income but beyond it, the future look-out for the younger son and the daughter was not a very great one.

"Such a dash they kept up," said Hatch, warming with her subject. "The Colonel liked show and parade, and Madam, as we always called her, had been born to it. She was the Honourable Mrs. Chantry, you see, sir, and chose to live according. They visited all the noble families round about, and were visited back again. The Somers' at Eastnor Castle, the Lyons' at Maddresfield, the Foleys at Whitley, the other Foleys at Stoke Edith, the Coventrys over at Croome, the Lechmeres at the Rhydd, the Hornyholds at Blacknore Park, and the Parkingtons at Ombersley—but there'd be no end if I stopped to tell you the half of 'em. Besides that, Mrs. Chantry counted a near relative in one of the cathedral prebendaries at Worcester—and for pride and exclusiveness some of those old prebendaries capped the world. So that——"

"But, Hatch, why are you telling me this?" I interrupted.

"To give you a notion of what my mistress was accustomed to when she was Miss Emma Chantry," promptly replied Hatch. "Well, Mr. Charles, they grew up, those three children, and I watched 'em grow; not that I was as old as they were; and I looked upon 'em as the finest and grandest young people in the world. The two sons spent a good deal more than they ought. Mr. Frederic especially, and the Colonel had to find a lot o' money, for 'twas wanted on all sides, and folks wondered how he did it. The end to it came all on a sudden—death."

"Whose death?"

"The Colonel's, sir. Mr. George, who was then Captain Chantry, and about twenty-seven years old, took the estate. But it was frightfully encumbered, and he complained bitterly to his mother that he should be a poor man for years and years to come. Madam resented what he said, and a quarrel ensued. She would not remain at the Hall, as he had expected her to do, but took a cottage at Malvern, and went into it with her daughter, with a parade of humility. She did not live very long after that, and Miss Emma was thrown on the world. Captain Chantry was married, then, to an earl's daughter; but his wife and Miss Emma did not get on together. Miss Emma refused to make her home at the Hall with Lady Grace, and she came to London on a visit to Miss Lucy Brightman, whose mother was living there. She and Miss Lucy had been at a finishing school together years before, and they had kept up their friendship. It was there she first saw Mr. Brightman, who was a great many years older than his sister; and it ended in their being married."

"And you came into their service, I suppose, Hatch?"

"I did, sir. They had been married near upon twelve months when young Mrs. Brightman found occasion to discharge two or three of her servants: and she wrote to the late housekeeper at Chantry Hall, asking her to find her some from our neighbourhood. London servants were *frightful*, she said: fine, lazy, extravagant and insolent. Mother heard about it, and spoke for me to go as under housemaid. Well, I was engaged, Mr. Charles, and I came up here to Clapham: and I was called 'Hatch' from the beginning, because my christian name, Emma, was the same as my lady's. Soon after that, Miss Annabel was born. It was my duty to wait upon the nurse and the sick-room; and my lady—who was ill and weakly for a long while—grew to like to have me there. She would talk about the old place to me, for you see I knew all the people in it as well as she did. Next, she made me upper housemaid; and in a very few years, for she had found out how clever I was at dressmaking and with the needle generally, I became her maid."

"And you are in her confidence, Hatch?" I rejoined. "Deservedly so, I am sure."

"In a measure I am, Mr. Charles. A lady like my Missis, who never loses her pride day nor night, cannot descend to be over con-

fidential with an inferior. But I know she values me—and so did my poor master. I mayn't be polished, Mr. Charles, but I'd go through fire and water for them any day."

And I am sure she would have done so.

Well, this was a portion of what Hatch told me. But I must now go back to the night whose events were interrupted for the purpose of recording these details. Not that there is anything more to relate of the night in question. Leaving a message that I would call on Mrs. Brightman in good time the following evening, wishing Annabel good-night, and Hatch also, I returned home.

CHAPTER XX.

PERRY'S REVELATION.

"DEAR STRANGE,—Have you seen the news in to-day's paper? I have just caught sight of it. If the *Vengeance* has foundered, or whatever the mishap may be, and Tom Heriot should be one of the escaped prisoners, he will be sure to make his way home. Rely upon it he has not grown less reckless than he was, but probably has become more so. What trouble may not come of it? Do try and get at the particulars officially, as to whether there's truth in the report, or not; and let me know without delay.

"Very truly yours,

"LEVEL."

Letters from Paris and the Continent generally were then usually delivered about mid-day. I was talking with Lennard in the front office when this one arrived. The clerks had gone to dinner.

"Have you heard the rumour about the ship *Vengeance*, Lennard?" I asked, laying down Lord Level's letter.

"I read it yesterday," he answered.

"I wonder how I could learn whether there's any foundation for it?"

Before he could answer me, we were interrupted by Major Carlen. He was in his usual state of excitement; his face lengthened, his arms thrown about, and his everlasting blue cloak trailing about him. I slipped the letter into my desk.

"Here's a pretty go, Charles!" he exclaimed. "Have you heard of it yet? That convict ship's gone to the bottom, and Tom Heriot has escaped."

"You should not assert that so positively, Major Carlen," I remonstrated. "It is not certain that any of the men have escaped, I suppose. If they have, Tom Heriot may not be one of them."

"But they have escaped," stuttered the grey old man, plumping himself down on a stool, around which his cloak fell like so much drapery. "Five have got off, and Tom is one of them."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know it? How could I tell you if I didn't know it? Half-an-hour ago I met Percival in Downing Street, and he told me."

What little hope had been left within me took wings and flew away. Percival was First Lord of the Admiralty. He would certainly know the truth.

"Government has had official news of it," went on the Major gloomily; "and with it a list of the fugitives."

"And Tom's name is amongst them?"

"Tom's name is amongst them."

There was a pause. Lennard had gone into the other room. Major Carlen rose, saying something about lunch waiting for him at his club.

"Mark you, Charles: if Tom takes it into that rattle-pate of his to worm his way back to these shores, there may be the devil to pay. I hope with all my heart Level won't hear of this. The disgrace has been a precious thorn to him from the first."

"Blanche knows nothing at all of the matter as yet. She thinks Tom is with his regiment in India. The last time I saw her in Paris, not long before Mr. Brightman's death, she asked me what could be the reason Tom did not write to her."

"Much better tell her, and get it over," spoke the Major. "I should, if I were Level. He is more careful of her than she deserves—silly chit!"

Major Carlen and his cloak swung out again, the clerks came back, and the day and its duties went on. I wrote to Lord Level; giving him the substance of what the Major had heard, and telling him that I thought there could be little fear of Tom Heriot's venturing back to England. He could never be so reckless as to risk the danger.

Dinner over, I started for Mrs. Brightman's, and was admitted by the butler; who told me, in answer to my inquiry, that his mistress had been ill all day and had not come down. Tea waited on the drawing-room table, but no one was in the room. Presently Annabel entered.

"I am sorry you should have had the trouble to come, when perhaps you could not spare the time," she said. "Mamma is not well enough to see you."

"I was not busy to-night, Annabel. Perry has just told me your mamma has not been down to day. Is her illness anything more than would be caused by these bad headaches? Do you fear anything serious?"

"Yes—no. I—I hope not."

Her voice and manner were excessively subdued, as if she could scarcely speak from fear of breaking down. She turned to the table, evidently to avoid my notice, and busied herself with the teacups.

"What is the matter, Annabel?"

"Nothing," she faintly answered, though her tears were even then falling. But I knew that some great trouble must be upon her.

"Is Mrs. Brightman vexed with you for having come up last night with that deed?"

"No; oh, no. I told mamma about it this morning, and she said I had done quite right to take it up, but that I ought to have gone in the carriage."

"What, then, is causing you this grief?"

"You cannot expect me to be in very good spirits as yet," she replied: which was a decided evasion. "There are times—when I feel—the loss——"

She fairly broke down, and, sinking into a chair, cried bitterly and without concealment. I waited until she had become calmer.

"Annabel, my dear, sorrow for your loss is not all that disturbs your peace to-night. What else is there?"

"It is true that I have had something to vex me," she admitted after a pause. "But I cannot tell you about it."

"It is a momentary trouble, I hope; one that will pass away——"

"It will never pass away," she interrupted, with another burst of emotion. "It will be a weight and a grief upon me as long as my life shall last. I almost wish I had died with my father, rather than have to live and bear it."

I took her hands in mine, and spoke deliberately. "If it be so serious a trouble as that, I must know it, Annabel."

"And if it were of a nature to be spoken of, you should know it. But it is not, and I can tell you nothing."

"Could you speak of it to your father, were he still living?"

"We should be compelled to speak of it, I fear. But——"

"Then, my dear, you can speak of it to me. From henceforth you must look upon me as in his place; your protector; your best friend: one who will share your cares, perhaps more closely than he could have done; who will strive to soothe them with a love that could not have been his. In a short time, Annabel, I shall ask you to give me the legal right to be and do this."

"It can never be," she replied, lifting her tearful eyes to mine.

I looked at her with an amused smile. I knew she loved me—and what other obstacle could exist? Mrs. Brightman might oppose it at first, but I did not despair of winning her over in the end.

"Not quite yet, I know," I answered her. "In a few months' time."

"Charles, you misunderstand me. I said it could never be. *Never.*"

"I certainly do not understand that. Had your father lived, it would have been; and I do not say this without reason for the assertion. I believe that he would have given you to me, Annabel, heartily, with all his good will."

"Yes, that may be true; I think you are right; but——"

"But what, then? One word, Annabel: the objection would not surely come from your heart?"

"No, it would not," she softly answered, blushing deeply. "Please do not speak of these things."

"I did not intend to speak of them so soon. But I wish to remind you that I do possess a right to share your troubles, of whatever nature those troubles may be. Come, my darling, tell me your grief."

"Indeed I cannot," she answered, "and you know I am not one to refuse anything from caprice. Let me go, Charles; I must make the tea."

I did let her go; but I bent over her first, without warning, and kissed her fervently.

"Oh, Charles!"

"As an earnest of a brother's love and care for you, Annabel, if you object for the present to the other," I whispered.

"Yes, yes; be a brother to me," she returned, with strange yearning. "No other tie can now be ours."

"My love, it *shall* be."

She rang for the urn, which Perry brought in, and then sat down to the table. I placed myself opposite to her, and drew the dry toast towards me. "Mrs. Brightman prefers this, I believe; shall I prepare some for her?"

Annabel did not answer, and I looked up. She was struggling with her tears again. "I fear mamma is not well enough to eat," she said, in a stifled voice.

"Annabel," I suddenly exclaimed, a light flashing upon me: "your mother is worse than you have confessed: it is her illness which is causing you this pain."

Far greater than any that had gone before was the storm of emotion that shook her now. I rose in consternation and approached her, and she buried her face in her hands. It was very singular. Annabel Brightman was calm, sensible, open as the day. She seemed to-night to have borrowed another character. Suddenly she rose, and nervously putting my hand aside, walked once or twice up and down the room, evidently to obtain calmness. Then she dried her eyes, and sat down again to the tea-tray. I confess that I looked on in amazement.

"Will you be kind enough to ring, Charles? Twice, please. It is for Hatch."

I did so, and returned to my seat. Hatch appeared in answer to her signal. Annabel held the cup of tea she had poured out.

"Mamma's tea, Hatch."

"She won't take none, miss."

It is impossible to resist the temptation of now and then giving the grammar and idioms Hatch had brought from her country home,

and had never since attempted to alter or improve. But what Hatch lacked in accuracy, she made up in fluency, for a greater talker never flourished under the sun.

"If you could get her to drink a cup, it might do her good," pursued Hatch's young mistress. "Take it up, and try."

Hatch flirted round, giving me full view of her black streamers, and brought forward a small silver waiter. "But 'twon't be of no manner of use, Miss Annabel."

"And here's some toast, Hatch," cried I.

"Toast, sir! Missis wouldn't look at it. I might as well offer her a piece of Ingy-rubbins to eat. Miss Annabel knows——"

"The tea will be cold, Hatch; take it at once," interposed Miss Annabel.

"Annabel, who is attending your mamma? Mr. Close, I suppose."

"Mr. Close. She never will have anyone else. I fear mamma must have been ill for some time; but I have been so much away with Aunt Lucy that I never noticed it before."

"Ay; Hastings and your aunt will miss you. I suppose Mrs. Brightman will not spare you now as she has hitherto done."

Annabel bent her head over the tea-tray, and a burning colour dyed her face. What had my words contained to call up the emotion? Presently she suddenly rose and left the room, saying she must see whether the tea had been taken. She returned with the empty cup, looking somewhat more cheerful.

"See, Charles, mamma *has* taken it: I do believe she would take more nourishment, if Hatch would only press it upon her. She is so very weak and depressed."

Annabel filled the cup again, and Hatch came in for it. "Suppose you were to take up a little toast as well; mamma might eat it," suggested Annabel, placing the cup on the waiter.

"Oh, well, not to contrairy you, Miss Annabel," returned Hatch. "I know what use it will be, though."

She held out the waiter, and I was putting the small plate of toast upon it, when screams arose from the floor above. Loud, piercing screams; screams of fear or terror; and I felt sure that they came from Mrs. Brightman. Hatch dashed the waiter on to the table, upsetting the tea, and dashed out of the room.

I thought nothing less than that Mrs. Brightman was on fire, and should have been upstairs as speedily as Hatch; but Annabel darted before me, closed the drawing-room door, and stood against it to prevent my exit, her arms clasping mine in the extremity of agitation, the shrieks above still sounding in our ears.

"Charles, you must not go! Charles, stay here! I ask it of you in my father's name."

"Annabel, are you in your senses? Your mother may be on fire! She must be on fire: do you not hear her screams?"

"No; it is nothing of that sort. I know what it is. You could

do no good; only harm. I am in my own house—its mistress just now—and I tell you that you must not go up."

I looked down at Annabel. Her face was the hue of death, and though she shook from head to foot, her voice was painfully imperative. The screams died away.

A sound of servants was heard in the hall, and Annabel turned to open the door. "You will not take advantage of my being obliged to do so, Charles?" she hurriedly whispered; "you will not attempt to go up?"

She glided out and stood before the servants, arresting their progress as she had arrested mine. "It is only a similar attack to the one mamma had last night," she said, addressing them. "You know that it arises from nervousness, and your going up would only increase it. She prefers that Hatch alone should be with her; and if Hatch requires help, she will ring."

They moved away again, slowly; and Annabel came back to the drawing-room.

"Charles," she said, "I am going upstairs. Pray continue your tea, without waiting for me; I will return as soon as possible."

And all this time she was looking like a ghost, and shaking like an aspen leaf.

I crossed to the fire, almost in a dream, and stood with my back to it. My eyes were on the tea-table, but they were eyes that saw not. All this seemed very strange. Something attracted my attention. It was the tea that Hatch had spilt, slowly filtering down to the carpet. I rang the bell to have it attended to.

Perry answered the ring. Seeing what was wrong, he brought a cloth and knelt down upon the carpet. I stood where I was, and looked on, my mind far away.

"Curious thing, sir, this illness of mistress's," he remarked.

"Is it?" I dreamily replied.

"The worst is, sir, I don't know how we shall pacify the maids," he continued. "I and Hatch both told them last night what stupids they were to take it up so, and that what missis saw could not affect them. But now that she has seen it a second time—and of course there was no mistaking the screams just now—they are turning rebellious over it. The cook's the most senseless old thing in the world! She vows she won't sleep in the house to-night; and if she carries out her threat, sir, and goes away, she'll spread it all over the neighbourhood."

Was Perry talking Sanscrit? It was about as intelligible to me as though he had been. He was still over the carpet, and in matter-of-fact tones which shook with his exertion, for he was a fat man, and was rubbing vehemently, he continued:

"I'm sure I couldn't have believed it. I wouldn't have believed it, sir, but that I have been in the house and a witness to it, as one may say; at any rate, heard the screams. For a more quieter, amiabler,

and peaceabler man never lived than my master, kind to all about him, and doing no harm to anybody; and why he should Walk is beyond our comprehension."

"Why he should—what?" I exclaimed.

"Walk, sir," repeated Perry. "Hatch says it's no doubt on account of his dying a sudden death; that he must have left something untold, and won't be laid till he has told it. It's apparent, I take it, that it concerns Mrs. Brightman, by his appearing to her."

"What is it that has appeared to Mrs. Brightman?" I asked, doubting my ears.

Perry arrested his occupation, and raised himself to look at me. "My dead master, sir," he whispered mysteriously. "Master's ghost."

"Your master's—ghost!" I echoed.

"Yes, sir. But I thought my young lady had told you."

I felt an irreverent inclination to laugh, in spite of the serious surroundings of the topic. Ghosts and I had never had any affinity with each other. I had refused to believe in them as a child, and most unhesitatingly did so as a man. When I returned the "Old English Baron" to Annabel, some years before, she wished she had never lent it to me, because I declined to accept the ghost.

"I am sure, sir, I never supposed but what Miss Annabel must have imparted it to you," repeated Perry, as if doubting his own discretion in having done so. "But somebody ought to know it, if it's only to advise; and who so fit as you, sir, master's friend and partner? *I* should send for a clergyman, and let him try to lay it; that's what I should do."

"Perry, my good man," and I looked at his bald head and rotund form, "you are too old, and I should have thought, too sensible to believe in ghosts. How can you possibly listen for a moment to stories so absurd as these?"

"Well, sir," argued Perry, "my mistress did see it or she didn't; and if she didn't, why should she scream and say she did? You heard her screams just now; and they were worse yesterday."

"Did you see the ghost?"

"No, sir; I was not up there. Hatch thought she saw it as she went into the room. It was in a corner, and wore its shroud: but when we got up there it was gone."

"When was all this?"

"Last night, sir. When you left, Miss Annabel took off her bonnet in the drawing-room and rang for tea, which I carried in. Presently Hatch ran in at the front door, and Miss Annabel told me to call her in. 'Has mamma had her tea, Hatch?' said my young lady. 'Yes, she has,' returned Hatch; which was a downright falsehood, for she had not had any. But Hatch is master and missis too, as far as we servants go, and nobody dares contradict her. Perhaps she only said it to keep Mrs. Brightman undisturbed, for she knows

her ailments and her wants and ways better than Miss Annabel. So, sir, I went down, and Hatch went up, but not, it seems, into Mrs. Brightman's room, for she thought she was asleep. In two or three minutes, sir, the most frightful shrieks echoed through the house; those to-night were nothing half as bad. Hatch was first in the chamber, Miss Annabel next, and we servants last. My mistress stood at the foot of the bed, which she must have left ——"

"Was she dressed?" I interrupted.

"No, sir; she was in her night-gown, or a dressing-gown it might have been. She looked like—like—I don't hardly know what to say she looked like, Mr. Strange, but as one might suppose anybody would look who had seen a ghost. She was not a bit like herself. Her eyes were starting and her face was red with terror; almost all alight, as one may say; indeed, she looked mad. As to her precise words, sir, I can't tell you what they were, for when we gathered that it was master's ghost which she had seen, appearing in its shroud in the corner by the wardrobe, the women servants set up a cry and ran away. That stupid cook went into hysterics, and declared she wouldn't stop another night in the house."

"What was done with Mrs. Brightman?"

"Miss Annabel—she seemed terrified out of her senses, too, poor young lady—bade me hasten for Mr. Close; but Hatch put in her word and stopped me, and said the first thing to be done was to get those shrieking maids downstairs. Before I and John had well done it—and you'd never have forgot it, sir, had you seen 'em hanging on to our coat tails—Hatch followed us down, bringing her mistress's orders that Mr. Close was not to be fetched; and indeed, as Hatch remarked, of what use could a doctor be in a ghost affair. But this morning Miss Annabel sent for him."

"Mrs. Brightman must have had a dream, Perry."

"Well, sir, I don't know; it might have been; but she is not one given to dreams and fancies. And she must have had the same dream again now."

"Not unlikely. But there's no ghost, Perry; take my word for it."

"I hope it will be found so, sir," returned Perry, shaking his head as he retired; for he had done his work and had no further pretext for lingering.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOMEONE ELSE SEEN.

STANDING with my back to the fire in the drawing-room, waiting for Annabel's return, the tea growing cold on the table, I puzzled over what I had just heard, and could make nothing of it. That Mr. Brightman's spirit should appear to his wife, seemed to be utterly incomprehensible; was, of course, incredible. That many people

believed in the reappearance of the dead, I well knew; but I had not yet made up my mind to become one of them.

It was inexplicable that a woman in this enlightened age, moving in Mrs. Brightman's station, could yield to so strange a delusion. But, allowing that she had done so, did this sufficiently explain Annabel's deep-seated grief?—or the remark that her grief would end only with her life; or the hint that she could never be my wife? And why should she refuse to confide these facts to me? why, indeed, have prevented my going upstairs? I might have reassured Mrs. Brightman far more effectually than Hatch; who, by Perry's account, was one of the believers in the ghost theory. It was altogether past comprehension, and I was trying hard to arrive at a solution when Hatch came in, her idioms in full play.

"My young lady's complemens, sir, and will you excuse her coming down again to-night; she is not equal to seeing nobody. And she says truth, poor child," added Hatch, "for she's quite done over."

"How is your mistress now, Hatch?"

"Oh, she's better, she is. Her nerves have been shook, sir, of late, you know, through the shock of master's unexpected death, and in course she starts at shadders. I won't leave the room again, without the gas a-burning full on."

"What is this tale about Mr. Brightman?"

Hatch and her streamers swung round, and she closed the door before answering. "Miss Annabel never told you *that;* did she, sir?"

"No; but I have heard a word or two elsewhere. You fancy you saw a ghost?"

"Missis do."

"Oh, I thought you did also."

"I just believe it's a delusion of hers, Mr. Charles, and nothing more," returned Hatch confidently. "If master had been a bad sort of character, or had taken his own life, or anything of that, why the likelihood is that he might have walked, dying sudden. But being what he was, a Christian gentleman that never missed church, and said his own prayers at home on his knees regular—which I see him a doing of once, when I went bolt into his dressing-room, not beknowing he was in it—why it is not likely, sir, that he comes again. I don't say as much to them downstairs; better let them be frightened at his ghost than at—at—anybody else's. I wish it was master's ghost, and nothing worse," abruptly concluded Hatch.

"Nothing worse! Some of you would think that bad enough, were it possible for it to appear."

"Yes, sir, ghosts is bad enough, no doubt. But realities is worse."

So it was of no use waiting. I finished my cup of cold tea, and turned to go, telling Hatch that I would come again the following evening to see how things were progressing.

"Yes, do, Mr. Charles; you had better," assented Hatch, who had a habit, not arising from want of respect, but from her long and confidential services, and the plenitude of her attachment, of identifying herself with the family in the most unceremonious manner. "Miss Annabel's life hasn't been a bed of roses since this ghost appeared, and I fear it is not likely to be, and if there's anybody that can say a word to comfort her, it must be you, sir; for in course I've not had my eyes quite blinded. Eyes is eyes, sir, and has their sight in 'em, and we can't always shut 'em, if we would."

Hatch was crossing the hall to open the door for me, and I had taken my great coat from the stand, when Annabel flew down the stairs, her face white, her voice sharp with terror.

"Hatch! Hatch! mamma is frightened again!"

Hatch ran up, two stairs at a time, and I went after her. Mrs. Brightman had followed Annabel, and now stood outside her chamber door in her white dressing-gown, trembling violently. "He is watching me again," she panted: "he stands there in his grave-clothes!"

"Don't you come," cried Hatch, putting Annabel back unceremoniously. "I shall get my missis round best alone; I'm not afraid of no ghostesses, not I. Give a look to her, sir," she added, pointing to Annabel, as she drew Mrs. Brightman into her chamber, and fastened the door.

Annabel, her hands clasped on her chest, shook as she stood. I put my arm round her waist and took her down to the drawing-room. I closed the door, and Annabel sat down on the sofa near the fire.

"My darling, how can I comfort you?"

A burst of grief prevented her from replying; grief that I had rarely witnessed. I let it spend itself; you can do nothing else with emotion so violent: and when it was over I sat down beside her.

"Annabel, you might have confided this to me at first. It can be nothing but a temporary delusion of Mrs. Brightman's, arising from a relaxed state of the nervous system. Imaginary spectral appearances——"

"Who told you about that?" she interrupted, in agitation. "How came you to hear it?"

"My dear, I heard it from Perry. But he did not break faith in speaking of it, for he thought you had already told me. There can be no reason why I should not know it; but I am sorry that it has penetrated to the servants."

Poor Annabel laid her head on the arm of the sofa, and moaned.

"I do not like to leave you or Mrs. Brightman either, in this distress. Shall I remain in the house to night? I can send a message to Leah——"

"Oh, no, no," she hastily interrupted, as if the proposal had startled her. And then she continued slowly, hesitatingly, pausing between her words: "You do not—of course—believe that—that papa——"

"Of course I do not," was my hearty reply, relieving her from her embarrassing question. "Nor you either, Annabel: although, as a child, you devoured every ghost-story you came near."

She made no confirmatory reply, only looked down, and kept silence. I gazed at her wonderingly.

"It terrified me so much last night," she whispered.

"What terrified you, Annabel?"

"I was terrified altogether; at mamma's screams, at her words, and the nervous state she was in. Mr. Close has helped to frighten me, too, for I heard him say this morning to Hatch that such cases have been known to end in madness."

"Mr. Close is—not worth a rush," cried I, suppressing what I had been about to utter impulsively. "So he knows of this fancy?"

"Yes, Hatch told him. Indeed, Charles, I do not see that there was any help for it."

"He will observe discretion, I suppose. Still, I almost wish you had called in someone who is a stranger to the neighbourhood."

"Mamma will not have a stranger, and you know we must not act in opposition to her will. She seemed so much better this morning; quite herself again."

"Of course. With the return of daylight these fancies subside. But as it seems there is nothing I can do for you, Annabel, I must be going, and will come again to-morrow evening."

The conclusion seemed to startle her. "Had—you—better come?" she cried, with much hesitation.

"Yes, Annabel, I had better come," I firmly replied. "And I cannot understand why you should wish me not to do so. As I can see you do."

"Only—if mamma should be ill again—it is all so uncomfortable. I daresay you never even finished your tea," glancing at the table. All trivial excuses, to conceal her real and inexplicable motive, I felt certain. "Good-night, Charles."

She held out her hand to me. I did not take it: I took her instead, and held her to my heart. "You are not yourself to-night, Annabel, for there is some further mystery in all this, and you will not tell it me. But the time will soon come, my dearest, when our mysteries and our sorrows must be shared in common." And all the answer I received was a look of despair.

In passing through the iron gates, I met Mr. Close. The moon to-night was obscured by clouds, but the gas-lamps revealed us plainly to each other. "How is Mrs. Brightman?" he asked.

"Very ill and very strange," I answered. "Do you apprehend any serious result?"

"Well—no," said he; "not immediately. Of course it will tell upon her in the long run."

"She has had another attack of nervous terror to-night; in fact, two attacks."

"Ay; seen the ghost again, I suppose. I suspected she would, so thought I would just call in."

"Would it not be as well—excuse me, Mr. Close, but you are aware how intimately connected I was with Mr. Brightman—to call in a consultation? Not that there is the slightest doubt of your skill and competency, but it appears to be so singular a malady; and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety, you know."

"It is the commonest malady we have to deal with," returned he; and the answer was so unexpected that I could only stare in silence.

"Have a consultation if you think it more satisfactory, Mr. Strange. But it will not produce the slightest benefit; and the less this matter is allowed to transpire, the better. I assure you that all the faculty combined could not do more for Mrs. Brightman than I am doing. It is a lamentable disease, but it is one that must run its course."

He went on to the house, and I got outside an omnibus that was passing the end of the road, and lighted my cigar, more at sea than ever. If seeing ghosts was the commonest malady doctors had to deal with, where had I lived all my life not to have learned it?

The next afternoon I was surprised by a visit from Perry. He brought word from his mistress that she was very much better, though not yet able to see me on business matters; when she felt equal to it, she would let me know. Miss Annabel, concluded the butler, was gone to Hastings.

"To Hastings!" I exclaimed.

"Well, yes, sir. My mistress decided upon it this morning, and I have just seen her off by train, with Sarah in attendance on her. Fact is, sir," added Perry, dropping his voice to a confidential key: "Hatch whispered to me that it was thought best the poor young lady should be out of the house while it is so troubled."

"Troubled!" I repeated, half in scorn.

"Why, yes, sir, you know what it is that's in it," rejoined Perry simply. "Mr. Close, too, he said Miss Annabel ought to be away from it just now."

When every hour of the day is occupied, time glides on insensibly. A week passed. I heard no news of or from Mrs. Brightman, and did not altogether care to intrude upon her, unbidden. But when the second week was also quickly passing, I determined to take an evening to go to Clapham. Dinner over, I was going downstairs, and met Leah coming up.

"If anyone calls, I am out for the evening, Leah," I said to her. "And tell Watts when he comes in, that I have left the *Law Times* on the table for Mr. Lake. He must take it round to him."

"Very well, sir."

I was nearing the top of Essex Street when I met the postman.

"Anything for me?" I inquired, for I had expected an important letter all day.

"I think there is, sir," he replied, looking over his letters under the gas-lamp. "'Messrs. Brightman and Strange;' there it is, sir."

I opened it by the same light. It was the expected letter, and required an immediate answer. So I returned, and letting myself in with my latchkey, went into the front office to write it.

Leah had not heard me come in. She was upstairs, deep in one of the two favourite ballads which now appeared to comprise all her collection. During office hours Leah was quiet as a mute; but in the evening she would generally croon over one of these old songs in an undertone, if she thought that I was out and she had the house to herself. As she was thinking now, for she sang out in full key, but in a doleful, monotonous sort of chant. Her voice was still very sweet, but had lost much of the power of its earlier days. One of these two songs was a Scotch fragment, beginning "Woe's me, for my heart is breaking;" the other was "Barbara Allen." Fragmentary also, apparently; for as Leah sang it there appeared to be neither beginning nor ending to it.

And as she wandered up and down,
  She heard the bells a-ringing,
And as they rang they seemed to say,
  Hard-hearted Barbara Allen.

She turned her body round and round,
  She saw his corpse a-coming;
"Oh, put him down by this blade's side,
  That I may gaze upon him!"

The more she looked, the more she laughed,
  The further she went from him;
Her friends they all cried out "For shame,
  Hard-hearted Barbara Allen!"

Whether this is the correct version of the ballad or not, I do not know; it was Leah's version. Many and many a time had I heard it; and I was hearing it again this evening, when there came a quiet ring at the street door bell. My door was pushed to, but not closed, and Leah came bustling down. Barbara Allen going on still, but in a more subdued voice.

"Do Mr. Strange live here?" was asked, when the door was opened.

"Yes, he does," responded Leah. "He is out."

"Oh, I don't want him, ma'am. I only wanted to know if he lived here. What sort of a man is he?"

"What sort of a man?" repeated Leah. "A very nice man."

"Yes; but in looks, I mean."

"Well, he is very good-looking. Blue eyes, and dark hair, and straight features. Why do you want to know?"

"Ay, that's him. But I don't know about the colour of his eyes; I thought they was dark. Blue in one light and brown in another, maybe. A tallish, thinnish man."

"He's pretty tall; not what can be called a maypole. A little taller than Mr. Brightman was."

"Brightman and Strange, that's it? 'Tother's an old gent, I suppose?" was the next remark; while I sat, amused at the colloquy.

"He was not old. He is just dead. Have you any message.

"No, I don't want to leave a message; that's not my business. He told me he lived here, and I came to make sure of it. A pleasant, sociable man, ain't he; no pride about him, though he is well off and goes cruising about in his own yacht."

"No pride at all with those he knows, whether it's friends or servants," returned Leah, forgetting her own pride, or at any rate her discretion, in singing my praises. "Never was anybody pleasanter than he. But as to a yacht——"

"Needn't say any more, ma'am; it's the same man. Takes a short pipe and a social dram occasionally, and makes no bones over it."

"What?" retorted Leah indignantly. "Mr. Strange doesn't take drams or smoke short pipes. If he just lights a cigar at night, when business is over, it's as much as he does. He's a gentleman."

"Ah," returned the visitor, his tones expressing a patronising sort of contempt for Leah's belief in Mr. Strange: "gents that is gents indoors, be not always gents out. Though I don't see why a man need be reproached with not being a gent because he smokes a honest clay pipe, and takes a drop short; and Mr. Strange does both, I can tell ye."

"Then I know he does not," repeated Leah. "And if you knew Mr. Strange, you wouldn't say it."

"If I knew Mr. Strange! Perhaps I know him as well as you do, ma'am. He don't come courting our Betsy without my knowing of him."

"What do you say he does?" demanded Leah, suppressing her wrath.

"Why, I say he comes after our Betsy; leastways, I'm a'most sure of it. And that's why I wanted to know whether this was his house or not, for I'm not a-going to have her trifled with; she's my only daughter, and as good as he is. And now that I've got my information I'll say good-night, ma'am."

Leah shut the door, and I opened mine. "Who was that, Leah?"

"My patience, Mr. Charles!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "I thought you were out, sir."

"I came in again. Who was that man at the door?"

"Who's to know, sir—and what does it matter?" cried Leah. "Some half-tipsy fellow who must have mistaken the house."

"He did not speak as though he were tipsy at all."

"You must have heard what he said, sir."

"I heard."

Leah turned away, but came back hesitatingly, a wistful expression in her eyes. I believe she looked upon me as a boy still, and cared for me as she did when I had been one. "It is not true, Mr. Charles?"

"Of course it is not true, Leah. I neither take drams short, nor go courting Miss Betsys."

"Why, no, sir, of course not. I believe I must be getting old and foolish, Mr. Charles. I should just like to wring that man's neck for his impudence!" she concluded, as she went upstairs again.

But what struck me was this: either that one of my clerks was playing pranks in my name—passing himself off as Mr. Strange, to appear large and consequential; and if so, I should uncommonly like to know which of them it was—or else that something was being enacted by those people who made the sorrow of Leah's life; that daughter of hers and the husband—as we will call him. For the voice at the door had sounded honest and the application genuine.

Posting my letter, I made the best of my way to Clapham. But I had my journey for nothing, and saw only Perry. His mistress had been getting much better, he said, but a day or two ago she had a relapse and was again confined to her room, unable to see anyone. Mr. Close had ordered her to be kept perfectly quiet. Annabel remained at Hastings.

"And what about that fright, Perry, that you were all so scared with a fortnight ago?" I asked, as he strolled by my side back to the iron gates: for it was useless for me to go in if I could not see Mrs. Brightman. "Has the house got over it yet?"

"Sir, it is in the house still," he gravely answered.

"Do you mean the scare?"

"I mean the ghost, sir. Poor master's spirit."

I turned to look at his face, plainly enough to be discerned in the dimness of the foggy night. It was no less grave than his words had been.

"The figure does not appear every night, sir; only occasionally," he resumed, "and always in the same place—in the angle by the wardrobe in Mrs. Brightman's bed-room. It stands there in its grave-clothes."

What with the dark trees about us, the weird evening, and Perry's shrinking tones, I slightly shivered, for all my unbelief.

"But, Perry, it is *impossible*, you know. There must be delusion somewhere. Mrs. Brightman's nerves have been unstrung by her husband's death."

"Hatch has seen it twice, Mr. Strange," he rejoined. "Nobody can suspect Hatch of having nerves. The last time was on Sunday night. It stood in its shroud, gazing at them—her and the mistress—with a mournful face. Master's very own face, sir, Hatch says, just as it used to be in life; only white and ghastly."

It was a ghastly subject, and the words haunted me all the way back to town. Once or twice I could have declared that I saw Mr. Brightman's face, pale and wan, gazing at me through the fog. Certainly Hatch had neither nerves nor fancies; no living woman within my circle of acquaintance possessed less. What did it all mean? Where could the mystery lie?

Stirring the fire into a blaze when I got into my room, I sat before it, and tried to think out the problem. But the more I tried, the more effectually it seemed to elude me.

With the whir—r—r that it always made, the clock on the mantelpiece began to strike ten. I started. At the same moment, the door opened slowly and noiselessly, and Leah glided in. Mysteriously, if I may so express it: my chamber candlestick carried in one hand, her shoes in the other. She was barefooted; and, unless I strangely mistook, her face was as ghastly as the one Perry had been speaking of that night.

Putting the candlestick on a side-table, slipping her feet into her shoes, and softly closing the door, she turned to me. Her lips trembled, her hands worked nervously; she seemed unable to speak.

"Why, Leah!" I exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"Sir," she then said, in the deepest agitation, "I have seen to-night that which has almost frightened me to death. I don't know how to tell you about it. Watts has dropped asleep in his chair in the kitchen, and I took the opportunity to steal up here. I wouldn't let him hear it for the world. He is growing suspicious, fancying I'm a bit odd at times. He'd be true in this, I know, but it may be as well to keep it from him."

"But what is it, Leah?"

"When I saw him, I thought I should have dropped down dead," she went on, paying no attention to the question. "He stood there with just the same smile on his face that it used to wear. It was *himself*, sir; it was, indeed."

May I be forgiven for the folly that flashed over me. Occupied, as my mind was, with the apparition haunting the house at Clapham, what could I think but that Leah must have seen the same?

"You mean Mr. Brightman," I whispered.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, approaching nearer to me, whilst glancing over her shoulder as if in dread that the ghost were following her: "does *he* come again, Mr. Charles? Have you seen him? Is he in the house?"

"No, no; but I thought you meant that, Leah. Who is it that you have seen?"

"Mr. Tom, sir. Captain Heriot."

(To be continued.)

A PLEA FOR THE WILD FLOWERS.

Hints to Collectors at Home and Abroad.

FEW things are more remarkable than the rapid advance which the love of flowers has made with all classes in society during the last few years. The effects of this are to be seen as much in the courts and alleys of our most crowded cities and in the village homes of the poorest, as in the mansions and gardens of the most wealthy. It has also developed an industry to satisfy its demands, with which the old-fashioned nurseries of the past can show nothing in common.

That this love of flowers is a mark of social improvement, no one can for a moment gainsay. There is a humanising influence in associating with flowers that, wherever it exists, cannot fail to be productive of good. We often call to mind a little incident which some time ago came under our own observation in confirmation of this. We were calling on a friend—a man of high standing in the medical profession, whose opinion was always well worth his fee. We found him just home from a hospital meeting, agitated and vexed at something that had gone wrong. He began to speak—full of his grievance—stopped short after a few minutes, rang the bell, and ordered his servant to bring him a jug of cold water and his scissors. Then, spreading a newspaper on his table, he collected all the flowers that were in the many different vases in his room, cut their stalks, gave them fresh water, and re-arranged them. This done, "There, now," he said, "I am all right now. In the whole pharmacopœia there's no better medicine for nervous agitation than that—nothing that sooner gets rid of anger, malice and all uncharitableness, with the physical ills that are sure to attend them, than re-arranging cut flowers." And who that has tried it will deny that he was right? It would be interesting to test the moral influence of association with flowers by reference to the statistics of crime. Such a reference would naturally support the same conclusion; and if so, this prevailing taste for flowers would seem, without a doubt, to merit every encouragement.

But however true it is that flowers afford not merely a pleasurable occupation, but have an undoubted influence for good on society generally, it must be admitted that this increased and increasing fondness for them is not unattended by a certain amount of harm to the flowers themselves. It seems hard to say this—hard to suggest a caution, about what, at first sight, must appear to be a very innocent occupation, and quite apart from all harm. A little reflection, however, will show that plant collecting—that is, wild plant collecting, which is at the root of the matter—must necessarily be bounded by

certain limits, or, after a time, there will be no plants left to collect. It is not an agreeable anticipation, but it is, nevertheless, quite within the range of things possible, that all the wild plants should be rooted out from any country, and the land left bare. Such, indeed, would be but the extension of what is found to be the case at present in several parts of our own islands. It is an admitted fact, that there are many places, especially in England and Wales, where, a few years ago, certain plants were abundant which are now entirely denuded; and, unhappily, it is the choicest and the rarest of our native Flora that are the first to become extinct.

The habitats of these rare plants are few, but in these days they very readily become known to professional collectors and to tourists. Handbooks of all parts, both at home and abroad, are numerous, and published at prices that bring them within reach of all, so that few persons travel without them. In most, if not all of these handbooks, there are chapters on the Flora of the parts to which they refer, giving generally a far too accurate description of the localities where any choice plants may be found.

It can hardly be a matter of wonder, then, that in these days of easy transit, when everybody is more or less a tourist, native wild plants have become scarce. Whether for their money value, or for the desire of possession, or for the mere pleasure of collecting, certain plants are continually being removed from the soil and climate that suit them best to live or die, as the case may be, in some other home.

Not unfrequently plant collecting is nothing more than a wanton amusement engaged in for the mere excitement of search, without the slightest appreciation of the plants themselves, and in utter ignorance of what to do with them when gained.

That this is no over-statement of the waste of our native Flora, and especially of ferns, which every season brings with it, must be evident to anyone who takes the smallest interest in the matter. In all the most favoured places of resort for tourists, the destruction here alluded to has for some time been going on. The south and south west of England, Dorsetshire, Devonshire and Cornwall, the lake districts, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, places all long famous for their wild plants, have for some years been and still are great sufferers in this respect.

Railway carriages, especially in excursion trains, the seats of the drags and various vehicles that ply for hire in these parts, the decks and cabins of the different steamboats, hotels and lodgings everywhere bear testimony to this waste. We speak of what has come under our own observation, for we have visited all these places, and seen what is here described. We have seen and sorrowed at the sight—fragments of choice ferns scattered about the places where they have been found, roots that might have been preserved, or at any rate left to grow on where nature planted them, but which have been so

carelessly raised, so torn and mutilated that their would-be collectors have not thought them worth the removal. How many railway stations, how many lodging-houses in the tracts of the ordinary tourist can tell the same tale? Beautiful flowers and choice ferns, dead and dying, strew the pathway of many a holiday excursion, and are not unfrequently the only evidence of the collectors' toil.

The raid at present in our own country is upon daffodils, primroses and ferns. Daffodils and primroses are both in fashion now. The former, however, being bulbous plants, are not so readily in a wild state reproduced from seed as many other things, and consequently are in the greatest danger of being altogether lost. The Lent lilies, the single and double daffodils are fast disappearing, and other more choice varieties of the narcissus family, *N. biflorus*, *N. poeticus*, *N. rugulobus*, etc. etc., are now rarely to be found. There is a bank not far away from our own study, where years ago the lovely little Lent lilies grew and flowered in profusion—and a pretty sight it was on a bright day in spring to see them in all their native beauty—now nearly all are gone: a few occasional stragglers serve only to mark the spot.

The wild primroses, happily, will make a stouter struggle for existence. They spring up so readily from seed, and seed is generally very abundant. Still, in places within easy access of towns, it can at once be seen by any interested observer that primroses are mortal. It is, however, quite certain that the most lamentable and telling waste of the present day in our country occurs in the case of ferns. Here, again, the choicest varieties are the most exposed to the danger of total loss. The holly fern (*Polystichum Lonchitis*), the parsley fern (*Allosorus crispus*), the oak and the beech ferns (*Polypodium Dryopteris* and *P. Phegopteris*), are all fast disappearing from their favourite haunts, while a specimen of the seaside Adiantum (*A. Marinum*) is as hard to be found on the rocky Cornish coast now as an eagle's nest; and, happily, where a specimen can be seen, it is quite as much out of reach.

Within an hour's drive of us, in Norfolk, until the last few years, there were growing wild about seventeen varieties of our hardy British ferns. As far as one can tell from careful observation, the choicest of these within this same area have quite disappeared. *Adiantum nigrum*, *Blechnum boreale*, *Filix fœmina purpurea* and *Lastrea cristata* are nowhere to be found; and the magnificent Osmunda regalis, which spreads its giant fronds so freely in certain cars by the river's bank, is fast becoming scarce.

Not many years ago *A. nigrum* lined a roadside bank in our village, where any amount of specimens could be seen, and so elsewhere with us grew the Blechnum: nor love nor money could procure a wild plant of either in the village now. *L. cristata* also overran a small marsh within compass of the drive just mentioned: on our last visit not a single specimen could be found. It is the

professional collector who does the wholesale damage. His visits are well-timed; in the country lanes he is undisturbed, and he is as careful as any poacher to escape detection when trespassing on private grounds. He and his employers know the habitats of all the different ferns, and they have always a ready market for them. Only lately a large marsh boat, filled with some of the finest specimens of *O. regalis* that could be collected, and rowed by two men, was stopped on our river on its way to a certain station of the G. E. R., whence it was to be conveyed as a truck load to a London dealer.

Of course, such plundering is punishable by law; but the ill effects of it do not pass away with the punishment of the offenders. There results from it, besides the loss of plants, a severe restriction upon tourists generally, and indeed upon all country visitors who love to see nature in her wildness, and who have no wish or intention to rob her of her charms.

It is, however, hardly to be wondered at that notice boards should be found in places, once free to every wanderer, warning trespassers to "Beware." "These woods and waters are private." "Ferns and wild plants in these grounds are protected," etc. But something more than notice boards and ordinary restrictive measures are needed to meet the evils here complained of, for these from the marshy places and otherwise secluded spots, where the choicest ferns and wild flowers grow, are too easily defeated. What is needed especially is the circulation of correct information and an appeal to the good sense of tourists generally not to encourage waste themselves; and, as far as they have the means of doing so, to discourage it in others. Much good would be done if visitors would cease to buy of the "professionals" who carry specimens about in baskets, and who destroy infinitely more than they bring with them for sale. And still greater good would be effected by placing printed notices in the waiting-rooms of railway stations, in hotels and other public buildings throughout the most favoured places of our native Flora, calling the attention of tourists to the waste that is going on, and requesting them to respect the ferns and wild plants of those parts. Thoughtlessness—want of knowledge of the harm that is being done—has more to answer for than any intentional waste.

These remarks upon the state of things in our islands apply quite as forcibly to what is taking place abroad. Though the continental area is not so limited or so accessible as our own, it is, nevertheless, being visited with a destruction that is making itself severely felt. "It is a lamentable truth," says Mr. Alfred Wills, "that as far as some of the loveliest Swiss plants are concerned, their destruction is an accomplished fact, while the entire Flora of the country has undergone palpable and grievous impoverishment during the last few years."

In all the ordinary continental routes—at every railway station—at every hotel throughout the Tyrol, collectors in crowds are to be met with soliciting tourists to buy. We have ourselves seen—notably

in the Straubinger Platz, at Bad Gastein—baskets full of uprooted plants of the loveliest Edelweiss ; every specimen of which would, in all probability, die, even if the purchasers in every case understood how best to keep transplanted specimens alive. It is, however, currently asserted, and with every appearance of truth, that much wilful destruction is made by these professional collectors in particular localities in order to increase the rarity of the plants they offer and keep up their market value.

It is gratifying to find that our neighbours abroad are becoming awake to their own interest. The Swiss, who by vigorous and well-directed efforts have saved their mountain Chamois from total destruction, seem equally resolute in affording protection to their mountain plants. A society, under the title of "Association pour la Protection des Plantes," has been established at Geneva with the two-fold object of disseminating useful information on the subject of the Alpine Flora, and undertaking to supply seedling specimens of all the different varieties at prices much below those usually extorted by the plant-hawkers. These plants raised from seed in the climate of Geneva are, of course, prepared to bear a temperature and treatment very different from their native habitat, and such seedling plants will, consequently, be found to succeed where the most carefully transplanted wild specimens will fail. These gardens at Geneva are of recent date. They were founded in 1883. We have not had an opportunity of seeing them, but from the reports by the "Association," which have kindly been sent to us, they appear to be doing great good, and each year testifies to a marked improvement. All the seedlings sent out are raised in pots, and so packed that they can safely be conveyed to any part of the world at all seasons. Seed also is supplied at a very cheap rate, and instructions given as to the best mode of raising plants.

The garden list of plants contains upwards of two thousand varieties, including orchids and ferns. Some few of the most rare are marked two francs and two-and-a-half, but half a franc is the general price. Packets of seeds of all sorts can be bought at half a franc each. By means of this garden at Geneva, and by the dissemination of their own useful reports, this Association pour la Protection des Plantes seeks to remedy a great existing wrong, and there is every reason to hope that it will do so.

A somewhat similar association would no doubt prove of great benefit in our own case.

Those persons who are desirous of knowing something more of the working of this admirable association should apply to

Monsieur H. Correvon,
Chemin Dancet,
Geneve.

From whom they will receive all necessary information.

Henry P. Dunster, M.A.

A DEBT OF HONOUR.

I.

MANY years ago, when I had but lately achieved the dignity of representing East Wanstead in the Conservative interest for the first time, my attention was attracted by the name of the Liberal Candidate for a manufacturing town in one of the Midland Counties. I wondered several times whether this Richard Atherstone could possibly be a strange fellow who had been at Balliol in my time, some eleven or twelve years before; a lunatic with a beautiful soul; an impracticable, hot-brained enthusiast with a guileless belief in all sorts of clap-trap; the liberty, equality and fraternity business, and so forth; and a no less childish and vehement abhorrence of all established forms.

He had earned a certain patronising respect from most of us by the sincere but hopeless efforts with which he endeavoured to carry out his theories (or principles, as he would have called them) in everyday life. He once invited all the college scouts to a wine party in his rooms, but could never afterwards be induced to refer to this entertainment, which we gathered from the gloom that seized him when we approached the subject, and from the voice of rumour, to have been of a painful and disastrous nature. It is certain that he quitted the best rooms in the college shortly after this event, and retired into melancholy lodgings, to escape, as we believed, from the importunate familiarities of the scouts who had partaken of his hospitality.

He used to take walks with a drunken radical cobbler, whom he declared to be a splendid fellow, and who was always borrowing money from him. He was cheated and imposed upon every day of his life; but every day seemed only to render him a more guileless and confiding prey for the human crows to gather around.

But at last one idea took complete possession of him, to the exclusion of all the rest: and he left Oxford suddenly to lay himself and his property at the feet of the Orpheus whose pipe had set the mountains and trees of Italy dancing after him, the rocks and stones of selfish and indolent hearts which had awakened with a flash to generous life in answer to the call.

Even I can grow enthusiastic over Mazzini. Young England was wild about him then, and it was small wonder that Atherstone was carried away altogether.

About the same time Inchkeith of Corpus, a queer creature, full of crotchets and always in opposition to everyone else, went off and enlisted on the opposite side, in the Austrian cavalry.

Atherstone succeeded in bearing along with him an Italian named Bellamonte, whose mother was an Englishwoman, and who had matriculated at Balliol about two years before, seeming heartily glad to escape from the red-hot crater of Italian politics.

He was older than the rest of us, and had been married very young to a charming lady of Austrian connections, who had found it expedient to persuade her husband to leave his storm-tossed country and visit his English property. Being a wise woman, the Contessa knew that the best way of keeping her husband contentedly in England until the storm should blow over at home was to give him plenty of interests here; so she induced him to come to Oxford and enter the University. Nor was this a difficult task. Bellamonte was a fervent Anglo-maniac at this time, and almost indifferent to the affairs of his own country.

For some time all had gone well, until that firebrand Atherstone had broken into their lives like a bombshell and had put all her peace to flight with extraordinary rapidity.

He obtained an immense hold over Bellamonte at once, and very soon turned him into an ardent patriot, eager to gird on the sword of his fathers and dash into the fray.

Bellamonte was anxious to leave his wife and child, whom he adored, behind in safety, but the poor woman would not be separated from him; so they went off together. How she must have cursed the author of all this trouble in her heart is easy to imagine; but she was a fine creature, too wise and self-controlled to give vent to her wrath against her husband's idol. Besides, any untimely opposition always confirmed Bellamonte mulishly in his own opinion. The best chance for her, she knew, would be the spectacle of her uncomplaining endurance.

One mild and fine afternoon at the end of March I was dawdling with a group of other men in the old gateway of the college; a practice that has been dear to undergraduates from the beginning of time, I suppose. The sun was striking warm upon the mouldy brows of the twelve Cæsars opposite, and lighting up the dark places of the venerable "schools." The chatter of the birds building in Trinity Gardens close by, and the deep droning of St. Mary's bell, alone disturbed the sleepy stillness of the old street. The faint perpetual mist of Oxford clung like a veil round the towers; the dreamy and scholastic atmosphere of the place entered into one's being that day.

Suddenly an open carriage came rattling over the noisy cobbles which no subsequent reform has banished from the streets of Oxford. It was taking the Italians away on their journey.

Bellamonte sat erect and smiling; a handsome, southern-looking man, with rich colouring and black curly hair. His old gay and careless air had given place to one hardly less gay, but seasoned with an energy and resolution which by no means detracted from his

good looks. Opposite him sat Luigi the younger, a fine boy of seven, very like his father. When he saw us he laughed and kissed his hand, and cried "A rivederlà, Signori." His father greeted us with wild waves of his beloved umbrella, which peaceful weapon he girded on when he first came to England, and never laid aside until he exchanged it for more deadly arms.

But the Contessa! I never saw on any human creature an expression which moved me more deeply than did hers then. She sat like a marble woman, deathly pale, her great eyes staring straight in front of her as at a vision of fate, her lips firmly closed, an image of self-contained despair.

When they came up, little Saunderson, the cox of our eight, who knew about three phrases of Italian and was very proud of them, suddenly yelled out "Viva l'Italia," as loud as he could: and for a man about the size of a respectable bullfinch it was amazing what a volume of sound he was able to produce.

We all started off and ran beside them for a little way, cheering and waving our hats. Bellamonte stood up, radiant and excited, returning our salutations with a grace unknown to Oxford. But his wife seemed still to see or hear nothing, until he bent down to touch her on the shoulder, and pointed to us who were running and shouting alongside of the carriage. Then she started, and slowly turned her head, smiling faintly at us for a moment; a smile so heartrending that somehow we could not cheer any more, but stopped short at the corner of Magdalen Street, as the carriage swept round the church known in Oxford as "the Archipelago."

It was almost with relief that we turned at the sound of shouts from a well-known voice at this juncture. A decrepit cab, with luggage on the roof, came clattering down "the Broad," and the driver was urging his miserable beast to further and extraordinary efforts in order to catch the train.

His fare meanwhile was making a great commotion inside, shouting, rattling and battering at the doors; but either the coachman was deaf or else he thought it was a work of supererogation to cheer him on to further exertions. At any rate, he never looked round, but only went on flogging and swearing at his horse.

A roar of laughter went up from us when we perceived Atherstone's undignified manner of departure on his romantic mission. The vehicle was in that last stage of decrepitude then a matter of course with Oxford conveyances; let us hope the age of hansoms has changed all that now. The knight-errant was scarlet with his exertions and frenzied with anger, but the cab crawled on, and so, amid shouts of derisive laughter, Don Quixote of Balliol made his exit from Oxford and set out on his quest.

News was received from the conspirators by their particular friends in college once or twice after their departure. But as they became more and more involved in the secrets of their party it became

impossible for them to write of their danger; and I, who was never very intimate with either, soon lost sight of them altogether.

Some years later I heard that Atherstone had returned to England, and this recurred to my memory when I saw the name of the successful candidate for D——. I wondered again if it were possible that years of melodramatic intrigue and conspiracy should end in producing a sober English M.P. For it was possible in those days to belong to the party of advanced Liberals and yet to remain an ordinary English gentleman.

On the night when the new member was to take his seat, I went down to the House rather earlier than usual with some feeling of curiosity, for all I had heard about him made me think it must be the same. I wondered whether such singular and varied experiences as his must have been had tamed the fanatic, and how much altered he would be.

Altered he certainly was. It might have been a man of fifty that advanced to take the oath before the table. His long legs and the short coat buttoned about his spare form still gave it the indescribable schoolboy appearance I remembered long ago--all his coats were always too short, somehow or other, for Atherstone—but little else remained of the ardent, impetuous youth who always walked at a galloping pace, and generally talked in a sort of joyful shout or bray, as I used to call it then.

All his old buoyant, and to me quite aggressive, animation was gone. He stooped a little; he carried his head bent instead of triumphantly aloft; his cheeks, always thin, were now quite hollow and bronzed; he was beginning to get bald, and his fair hair was already quite grizzled. He had a sombre, almost fierce expression, though this latter quality may have been due to his great moustachios, which were quite in character with a Mazzinian conspirator. But I noticed when he was speaking to one of his supporters what a peculiarly sweet smile he had, though this momentary lightening gave way again immediately to the look of settled gloom and depression.

We met presently in the lobby, and greeted one another with tha mingling of incoherent heartiness and embarrassment which usually characterises Englishmen on such occasions. However, we were rescued by one of the ministers beginning to speak, and accordingly prepared to hurry back to our seats. I bethought myself of asking him to come down and spend the following Sunday at my country house on the Thames.

"I should like to of all things," he said, passing his hand through his hair in perplexity; "but there's Luigi, you see. I can never leave Luigi."

"Luigi?" I repeated interrogatively. It was so like Atherstone of old to speak in this allusive strain, and forget that he needed an interpreter for his conversation.

"Luigi Bellamonte," explained Atherstone. "Oh, to be sure, you couldn't know; I forgot."

"Bellamonte!" I cried. The ice was quite broken between us now. "Of course I remember him perfectly. So he has come back to England all right! And is the Contessa with him, too? If so, pray beg them both to come with you."

Atherstone's face darkened. He turned abruptly away. "It's neither of them," he said, in a low voice; "but the son they left, from whom I never part."

Fresh mysteries here. "Well, bring him with you, at any rate," I said. "And, Atherstone, if you could manage to let me know by what train to expect you, I will send the carriage to the station to meet you. It's five miles away, remember." But recalling his habits at Balliol, I reflected afterwards that he must have changed indeed if he proved capable of this amount of forethought.

On Saturday I went down to Greenfield and waited. No word, of course, from my expected guest. I had brought a nephew of sixteen or seventeen down with me, a Harrow boy, to entertain this Luigi of Atherstone's. It was a perfect June day. The fresh woods below in the valley were loud with the singing of birds, the river flashed out between them, blue in the sunshine; the lawns were whitened with falling blossom from the chestnut and may-trees, the air was laden with a thousand scents. The carriage departed to spend the afternoon at the station; and towards six o'clock, Conway and I, lying on the short grass beside the drive, heard the wheels turning in at the upper gate.

We jumped up as they approached, and Atherstone sprang out in a disjointed sort of way. A pale youth, about eighteen or nineteen, with large dark eyes and black curly hair, sat still in his place, smiling vaguely and sweetly, but without speaking or moving. He looked to me like a pale ghost of the brilliant young Italian who had bid us all good-bye so gaily twelve years before, but the eyes were the eyes of Margherita Bellamonte; it was absolutely startling.

Atherstone turned to him when he had greeted us.

"Come, Luigi, and speak to Mr. Holbrook. He used to be a friend of yours when you were a little boy."

He spoke in a tone of gentle authority, which I afterwards noticed that he always used in addressing the boy. Luigi obeyed with the docility of a well regulated child. He was tall and well made when he stood up, though not so tall as his guardian. He turned to Atherstone, still with the same vague smile, and asked:

"Was that before?" indicating me.

"Yes, before," replied my friend, averting his face.

"Oh, then, of course I could not remember you," said Luigi, turning to me, as if no further explanation were needed. He spoke English perfectly, in a soft, musical voice; his manner was charming

and quite unembarrassed. My nephew Conway, glowering in hot self-consciousness in the background, despised him for it I saw.

I felt very much perplexed, but asked no questions, for it was easy to see in spite of his graceful manner that there was something wrong with poor Luigi. He had no more initiative than a baby; he had almost to be told to put one foot in front of the other, and never spoke except in answer to a question. Poor Conway evidently thought I had treated him very badly in foisting such a visitor upon him for entertainment.

At dinner we all began to get on well. Atherstone told some amusing election stories, and Conway cheered up immensely. He was panting to hear some tales of blood and adventure, with the prospect of which I had bribed him to assume a somewhat less disgusted and injured appearance.

Just as we were setting to work on our fish I noticed an odd change in the Italian boy's face. The gentle, vacant smile had disappeared, and he was looking about him with an anxious, apprehensive expression. A young Viennese footman whom I had lately engaged handed him the fish sauce; he shrank away and stared up at Hans with an expression of horror and fury which amazed that luckless youth, who stood there still proffering the peaceful sauce-boat. Atherstone, absorbed in the story he was relating, noticed nothing. I told Hans in German to pass on, but had scarcely spoken the words before Luigi started up with an incoherent exclamation, and staggering back a step or two, fell senseless on the floor.

Atherstone was beside him in a moment, the butler and Hans rushed to the rescue. "For heaven's sake send that German boy out of the room," exclaimed Atherstone, when Luigi showed signs of coming to life again.

II.

Later in the evening, when peace was restored, Luigi upstairs, and Conway relieving his feelings by setting night-lines in the big pond, my friend and I sat out in the verandah smoking cigars in the warm twilight. Atherstone was silent for some time, but presently, heaving a mighty sigh, he spoke.

"I owe you some explanation," he began, thrusting his hand through the long locks at the side of his head till they stood out at right angles to it, with an action familiar of old.

"Not at all," I said, crossing one knee comfortably over the other. "Don't attempt any unless you feel inclined. I am afraid, though, you are in trouble. You look worn out, and you have a heavy burden on your hands. It is just like you, Atherstone, to sacrifice yourself in this manner. I call it over-indulgence in benevolent action carried to an intemperate excess. If you must act guardian to that poor boy, why can't you get someone to look after him instead of giving up your whole life to him in this way?"

Atherstone interrupted me with a groan of anguish.

"Give up *my* whole life!" he cried. "You little know what you are talking about. Do you know, Holbrook, that I am a murderer, that the deaths of Luigi's father and mother both lie at my door, and that the wreck of himself is all my fault, my fault!"

He grew louder and louder in his excitement; it was necessary to calm him. I was startled, I own, and should have been more so if these statements had been made by anyone less extravagant in speech and action than Atherstone.

"My dear fellow," I said, "you look like the remorseful Weelyam of the melodrama. Men who have really committed murder don't treat it in this sort of style. Do be calm and tell me your story in a manner suited to my plain and unpoetical imagination. I have little doubt that you will prove to be a quite conventionally respectable character after all."

A little gibing reduced him quickly to a more collected frame of mind, and he went on:

"I should like to tell you about it. It is so long since I have seen anyone belonging to the old days. I had begun to think they never existed, except in my own imagination. The sight of you seems to bring it all back and make real that impossibly happy old life. Here are you at thirty-four, a young man with a career before you; prosperous, able, making your mark in the world, with nothing but hope in the future and no regrets in the past. While I at the same age have nothing but the wreck of a miserable life left, and the irreparable harm I have done embodied in human form always before me. Well, it cheers me somehow to be near you for a bit and sit in the sunshine of your prosperity. I had almost come to disbelieve in the existence of happiness."

I gave a grunt of sympathy and of disapprobation of these morbid sentiments, and he started again.

"You remember how I persuaded Bellamonte to go back and take part in the war of Italian Unity, and how we all went off from Oxford together?"

"I remember all the circumstances perfectly," I replied; "though how you ever succeeded in reaching the station whole and sound in wind and limb has been a subject of speculation for my leisure moments ever since."

He did not seem to hear, and after a few moments of absorbed reflection, leaning forward with his hands plunged in his hair, went on.

"Our head-quarters were at Milan. We met the chief there; and he was delighted to welcome Count Bellamonte, a man of property and influence in that part of the world, and one of the finest fellows that ever walked the earth. Bellamonte was employed in all sorts of ways. His wife's Austrian connections made him valuable where negotiations were concerned, from his knowledge of the

feeling on the opposite side. Moreover he turned out a splendid soldier; so Garibaldi gave him a high command in the army and relied upon him to carry through every sort of daring enterprise. No undertaking was ever too desperate for Bellamonte, and his men would follow him anywhere. His gay and dauntless courage sustained them in emergencies, and brought them by sheer pluck out of many a pass that would have seemed absolutely hopeless to anyone else.

"His wife had a terrible time, continually moving about the country after him with the boy; continually forced to fly from one place to another before the advance of her own countrymen; never knowing when she parted from her husband whether she would ever see him again. Her family and friends heaped the bitterest reproaches upon her for having, as they supposed, turned traitor to her country, and brought Luigi back to fight against them. I knew that I had been the means of bringing about all her sufferings; and though I was generally sure of having done right in the main, still I can tell you, Holbrook, it was pretty hard work to meet that unhappy woman with the consciousness that I was the cause of her misery, and that she knew it even better than I. Yet she never addressed a word of reproach to me. I often wished that she would. She never spoke to me at all if she could help it; and sometimes, when I watched her growing thinner and paler, an awful doubt seized me as to whether I was not, in reality, the blackest villain on earth. There was a look in her eyes, when she did turn them upon me, that made me feel uncommonly like it. I did all I could to help her; but if ever she found out that any arrangements for her comfort or safety were my doing, she would reject them at once; or if it was necessary for the child's sake, took any service from me as if it would have choked her. Bellamonte in vain tried to persuade his wife to take the boy with her, and wait for him in safety on the other side of the Swiss frontier, but no power on earth could induce her to leave him, though she was, of course, continually separated from him by the chances of the campaign. She clung to him as closely as she could, and followed him as closely as Assunta did the General.

"This went on for nearly four years, and all that time I was struggling in vain to join the army. My one desire was to fight, but greatly to my disappointment, the chiefs decided that I was more useful to them in other capacities. To take messages between them for instance, when they were in hiding, and to be a centre of communication generally. Being an Englishman, and apparently unattached to either party, I was able to move about tolerably freely, and escaped suspicion for an incredible time, to my surprise; for, as you know, diplomatic craft and subtlety are not much in my line. I hated the hole-and-corner business; I longed to go in and give some hard blows for the cause; but you can no more help doing what Mazzini bids you, than you can help putting one foot before the other when you

walk. They said all my blundering, ridiculous ways were really most useful to them; they misled wiseacres on the other side into believing me a harmless British simpleton.

"But in the end, to my great delight, the enemy got on the right scent. I was no use as a messenger any more, and the long-desired commission for Garibaldi's army at last arrived.

"We were all at Milan together just then. It was held by the Austrians, but negotiations were on foot, and we believed that we were in no danger. Besides, we were well disguised and in hiding with those whom we could trust. I had secured comfortable and safe quarters for the Bellamontes without the Contessa knowing that she was at all indebted to me in the matter. I was in tremendous spirits, and just on the point of setting out to make my way to the army, when a message arrived purporting to come from one of the chiefs, who did not know I had got my commission, directing me to give a verbal message on the second day from that time to someone whom I was to meet at a spot named, about a mile from the town.

"I was thrown into raging perplexity. My orders were to join the regiment at once. Any delay seemed to me like dashing the cup from my lips in the moment of attainment. I could not endure the hindrance, and the message seemed to be one of quite secondary importance. Bellamonte came to my help, and undertook to carry the communication. I could not see that there was any risk in connection with it; so I thankfully accepted his offer, and departed to join my regiment, which was then near Leghorn.

"A week afterwards I received a letter from Milan, directed in a hand that was somehow familiar to me. I opened it, and saw to my amazement the signature of Inchkeith at the end. Inchkeith of Corpus—do you remember him? A short, black-haired, cantankerous man, who went into the Austrian cavalry just about the same time we left Oxford."

"I remember him perfectly," I said. "Go on, old fellow." But he paused for several minutes, his face hidden in his hands.

"That letter," he continued brokenly at last, "told me that Bellamonte was dead—his wife dying—that he had named me as guardian of their boy, who might or might not live until I arrived. No particulars were given. There was a pass enclosed from the Austrian general, and an urgent appeal to come at once to Milan. I got leave, I suppose, and went like a man walking in his sleep. I read the letter over and over again, but I could not take it in. I was not capable even of wondering how all this had come about. They told me afterwards that whenever anybody spoke to me I could say nothing but 'Bellamonte is dead, his wife is dying, and Luigi too.' They thought I was mad, and so I was; quite mad; or rather idiotic, for the time. But when I arrived in Milan and drove through the familiar streets, this dazed condition began to pass off, my frozen

brain awoke, and shrank horror-stricken before the thing which it had to face.

"When I arrived at the house in the narrow street behind Sant Ambrogio, Inchkeith in his Austrian uniform met me half-way up the stone staircase and dragged me into an apartment below that which the Bellamontes occupied.

"'The little boy has taken a turn for the better,' he said. 'Come in here and rest a few minutes before you go up to the fourth floor. I am going to make you take some of this old Burgundy; you look more dead than alive.' He had led me, while speaking, into a room where there was a table set out with food and wine. I staggered to a chair and waved him away. 'The Contessa,' I gasped. 'What news of her?'

"He turned away abruptly and set down the glass he had filled on the table. There was silence in the room for a minute or two. Then: 'It is better so,' said Inchkeith presently, speaking with his back turned towards me; 'it is far better. She went very peacefully at sunrise this morning. Thank God she never awoke to the consciousness of what had happened after we brought her home. Upon my word it would be well if that poor little fellow upstairs were to follow his father and mother, as things are likely to be with him.' 'For Heaven's sake,' I said, 'tell me quickly how it all came about. Tell me all, all.'

"'My dear fellow, you are worn out,' said Inchkeith. 'I won't say another word till you have had some wine.' 'I won't touch it,' I cried, stamping with impatience, for a horrible suspicion was beginning to gather form in my mind. 'Do you want to drive me mad? Go on, go on!'

"And then he told me all. It seemed that when Bellamonte was about to start on his errand, his wife became unaccountably nervous and reluctant to let him go. The maid who had stayed by her through all those troublous times told us afterwards that she had flung herself on her knees before her husband, imploring him to stay at home and leave the message undone, in a wild way very unlike her usual courageous resignation. She said she had forebodings; but the Count thought them merely the result of physical weakness from the long strain on her nerves, and tried to laugh them away. Finding that he was determined to go, she became calm, but nothing would hold her back from accompanying him. After trying for some time to dissuade her he gave in, not supposing that there was really any risk in the expedition.

"Little Luigi and this maid went with his parents. They were all disguised as peasants, and strolled through the pleasant October sunshine to a little vineyard a mile or two beyond the city. A horse and cart were fastened to a tree, but nobody was in sight; so they sat down to wait. Luigi laughed and played with a little dog he found there; and Bellamonte, lying at his wife's feet, tried in every

way to cheer and rouse her from her depression. Presently he pulled a trail of reddened autumn leaves from the vine and bound them together, singing a gay little peasant's song the while. He had never been more merry and unsuspicious of danger, said the maid. When he had finished his crown he placed it on his wife's head, and bent down to kiss her.

"At this moment the little dog, excited probably by Luigi's games, gave some short sharp barks. There was a sudden gleaming of white uniforms through the vines and a clanking of swords and spurs. Bellamonte started up with an exclamation, and pulled a pistol from his bosom. Margherita threw herself silently and swiftly in front of him, but he pushed her aside with gentle violence, and told her for the boy's sake to keep behind. The vineyard was completely surrounded by a detachment of the cavalry regiment to which Inchkeith belonged. He himself was of the party, as also Margherita's eldest brother.

"The message brought to me had been an entire fabrication, a trap of the enemy's, who were watching the spot, but who had not known how valuable a prey was to fall into their hands. Bellamonte was of course overpowered immediately. That was a war waged with deadly hatred on both sides; deeds of violence were common enough.

"The order had been given beforehand that whoever was taken prisoner at this rendezvous should be shot as a spy on the spot, and the officer in command bade them make ready to carry it out. Margherita clung to her husband like a madwoman. He was quite calm and collected. He smoothed her hair and soothed her like a child, entreating her to go home at once with her boy, to take him away directly, so that they might not see the end. The rough soldiers themselves began to be deeply moved by the scene and with admiration of his courage. Inchkeith was tolerably inured to bloodshed, but he turned away, sickened at the thought of butchering this brave man, whom he recognised as his old acquaintance at Oxford.

"Margherita, suddenly perceiving her brother amongst the officers, flew to him and revealed herself, with agonised entreaties that he would save her husband. Unhappily, the officer in command dared not dispute the orders he had received, and the revelation that one of his most dangerous enemies had fallen into his hands only confirmed Bellamonte's doom.

"The Colonel was apprehensive of the effect of the scene if prolonged upon his men, and bade them prepare to carry out the sentence at once. Margherita's shrieks at first were terrible to hear; they mingled with those of her child and the maid. But when she saw that there was no hope of mortal aid and small space for parting, she collected herself with an extraordinary effort of will, that she might not embitter and lose these last moments. Bellamonte's courage had never seemed to waver, but the sound of her wa

said, was worse than death to him. He appealed to Margherita's brother for the protection of his wife and child, until such time as they should be able to leave for England, whither he begged her to go without delay, to his aunt.

"The brother, a weak creature, was too helpless and unnerved to answer. Inchkeith came forward and told Bellamonte that he was resolved to relinquish his commission at once, and that he would never leave the Contessa and her child till he had brought me to their help, or had handed them over himself to their relations in England. He thanked him, and gave him messages for me.

"After this Bellamonte called the boy to him and kissed him, took his wife in his arms for one long minute, and then firmly disengaged himself from her clinging hands. She was barely conscious when he handed her over to Inchkeith, and said, 'Take her away at once.' Then he walked away with a firm step between his guards, through trailing lines festooned from tree to tree, towards the fatal field. She revived after he had disappeared, and could not be kept back from following him, despite Inchkeith's desperate endeavours to restrain her. When she reached the open space, her husband was standing about one hundred yards away, the soldiers drawn up in line before him, waiting for the word to fire. She fell on her knees beside an olive tree from sheer inability to stand, and wound one arm round its old gnarled trunk to support herself.

"Inchkeith said that most strange and terrible scene will haunt him to his dying day: it all took place with such extraordinary rapidity. The afternoon's sunshine flooded the country; the silence was only broken by the distant sounds of peaceful labour and the shouts of children at their play, unconscious of the tragedy that was being enacted a few hundred yards away. The little line of soldiers, with their accoutrements flashing in the sunshine; the solitary figure of the man who was bearing himself so bravely, standing where I ought to have been, his bright and happy life suddenly to be cut off for no fault or crime; beneath the olive tree the pale and wasted beauty, bowed with her great agony, in the gay contadina's dress, still unconsciously wearing the Ophelia garland with which her husband had crowned her a quarter of an hour before.

"When the flash came from eleven rifles, Inchkeith clapped his hand over her eyes, but they were darkened already, and at the sound of the report she fell to all appearance as lifeless as her husband on the grass. No one had any attention to bestow on Luigi, or had noticed when he started running towards his father, crying bitterly. He reached the spot just as Bellamonte fell dead, pierced with eleven bullets. The child threw himself on the body, shrieking aloud, and the soldiers, all unmanned themselves, tried in vain to draw him gently away. At last he fainted, and was carried to the covered cart that was waiting close by.

"Inchkeith, gathering up the Contessa as easily as if she were a

child, placed her beside her boy. The body of the dead man was carried on a stretcher in front, the soldiers closed in behind, and the cart with its unconscious burden brought up the procession. Margherita Bellamonte only awoke some hours afterwards to fall into raving delirium. The sufferings of the last four years had been gradually wearing her away; the last cruel shock was the finishing blow. After a few days raving and tossing, she, too, was at rest.

"The child had been lying at death's door with brain fever, but the doctor had that morning declared that he would recover, though he hinted darkly at possible life-long consequences of that fatal day.

"When Inchkeith had finished his story, I suddenly found myself lying on the floor, with him forcing wine or something between my teeth. But this was no time for me to give way. I dared not even think. The horrible thought of the ill which I had wrought unknowingly lay in the back of my mind like a savage beast waiting for the moment to spring and catch me in its fangs. I went to take up my post by Luigi's bedside. I have never left him since for more than a few hours. It is nearly seven or eight years now since then.

"As I went upstairs I saw a door open and a darkened room. Some mysterious attraction drew my reluctant feet across the threshold to a bed, draped in white and covered with flowers, which stood in one corner. Still impelled by that irresistible impulse, I drew near, and looked at a face which I dreaded to see again. There I stood—the involuntary murderer—and looked at my victim. Remorse, despair and pity were all for the moment hushed. I was only conscious of envy, and longing to share the still repose to which that worn and tortured spirit had attained. Her beauty had never faded in all those years of perpetual anxiety and hardship; it had only become more and more spiritual in proportion as she grew worn and wasted. She lay now so quiet at last, after life's fitful fever. Do you remember how delicate and fine her features were? They were still more sharply chiselled after these four years. The long black lashes rested on her cheeks; her dark crisp hair, waving low on the forehead, was crowned with the drooping, faded wreath her husband had made for her in the last hour of his life. I don't know how long I stood there, but at last Inchkeith came and led me away and shut the door.

"As soon as Luigi was well enough to move I took him to England, and Inchkeith left us to go to America. Bellamonte's aunt was dead, and I, in any case, should have taken charge of him. It was long before the boy grew comparatively strong in body; his memory and reasoning powers never came back, and never will. As you see him now, so he has been ever since, and so he will remain to the end. He remembers nothing of that day except what he calls a black cloud; all that went before, all recollection of his father and mother, has completely gone. But though he has no idea of the meaning of

that black cloud which came over him, strangely enough the presence of any German, the sound of that language, which was the one spoken by those who put his father to death, throws him into the wild state of excitement you saw to-night.

"There, Holbrook! Now you know all. Can you wonder that I feel myself a murderer? Can even your cheerful optimism stand against a case like this?"

For some minutes I could not speak, the strange and tragic tale had absorbed me completely. The old church clock struck one, the night jar was busy with his eerie whirr in the dark and fragrant meadow close by. At last I recollected myself, but all the words that rose to my lips seemed hopelessly lame and inadequate to meet such a case as this.

"My poor Atherstone," I said, "you do wrong to embitter your life with these vain and needless self-reproaches. You and they were the victims of a cruel accident; that was all. From the first you acted from the highest motives; that is the most we can any of us do. You are not to blame; indeed, you are not to blame for any part of it."

"I *am* to blame," he said. "An undisciplined nature, carried away by every hasty impulse, is always to blame, and may, like me, bring more fatal woe upon its fellow-creatures than many a wretch who is hung on the gallows."

"Do not allow yourself to magnify your share of the blame—since you insist upon its being such—in this extravagant way," I said. "Is not this in itself one of those ill-regulated tendencies which you condemn so severely? Is the prime of your life, the years that are ripe for achievement, to be squandered in useless regrets and that vain misery of remorse in which no man has a right to consume the powers that still remain to him for the service of mankind? When once a lesson is learnt, when once it is well branded in, then away with this enervating paralysis of remorse, which is in itself almost as mischievous as crime."

I was mounted on my favourite hobby now, from which it is always difficult to dislodge me, but I spare my readers the bulk of my discourse. For some time longer I exhorted and argued with him, but I doubt whether I succeeded in lightening any portion of his load. It is seldom that it is granted to any human creature to be of much real help or comfort to any other where his need is the sorest.

We got through the next day very well on the whole. Hans was temporarily banished from the scene, and poor Luigi resumed his usual docile and smiling demeanour, though occasionally he looked about him anxiously, in the way that some people do when they feel that there is a cat in the room. I discovered, however, that one power had remained to him in the general wreck. He had the most sympathetic and beautiful voice I ever heard, and sang with a power and expression that must have been purely instinctive, seeing that the words on

his lips probably conveyed little or no meaning to him. There was something akin to pain in hearing that wonderful voice ring out an old Italian song of triumph, Carissimi's "Vittoria," just as his father had done before him many and many a time.

During the autumn recess I heard no more of Atherstone and his charge. Just before Parliament met in the following February I saw that his seat was again vacant. He wrote to me from Cannes to say that Luigi had been dangerously ill and was ordered to spend the winter in the South of France, so that he had been forced to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds.

Several months afterwards a variety of circumstances led me to Italy, and it came to pass that one sunny evening I lay basking on the roof of Milan cathedral amongst the intricate lace work of the decorations, looking down upon the fertile, peaceful Lombard plain. In a sort of torpid, sun-baked fashion, I tried to picture the terrible scenes whose memory seemed to have passed like the battle-smoke from the landscape. Far away, veiled in golden mists, loomed in shadowy shape the giants of the Alpine range. Lying on the warm leads with half-closed eyes I heard footsteps approaching, and presently a familiar, long-legged form passed in front of me, and leaned over the parapet bareheaded, absorbed in meditation. I got up and laid my hand on his shoulder. He turned round with a start, and greeted me with a miserable smile.

"How is it you are here, of all places in the world?" I demanded. "Where is Luigi?" It must have been decreed in the book of our destinies that I should invariably ask Atherstone the most unfortunate questions.

He drew me to the parapet and pointed out a little campanile rising from the fields a mile or two beyond the town. "I laid him there," he said, "this afternoon, beside his father and mother. Do you see that clump of trees? About one hundred yards to the right is the spot, which ought to have been my death-place, where his father fell. It is all over now, Holbrook; there is nothing more left for me to live for. Pray heaven the end may come soon!"

"The end," I cried. "Don't talk like that, Atherstone; it is weak, unmanly; you have no right. The end, indeed! Why, man, this is but the beginning; the beginning of a newer, happier life!"

"Too late! too late!" he groaned, and suddenly I turned to see his shoulders vanishing down the winding stairs.

I never saw Atherstone again, but a few months afterwards his death was reported from some remote corner of the Soudan, whither he had gone to help in suppressing the slave trade, and had died of fever. And so that eager, self-tormenting spirit was at rest at last. Peace be with his ashes!

M. C. Birchenough.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SKETCHING.

By Philip H. Calderon, R.A.

SKETCHING? Oh, dear, yes! there is nothing I like better. To tell you the truth, I doubt whether an artist is ever really thoroughly happy except when sketching out-of-doors from Nature.

In the studio the practice of our art is full of troubles and anxieties. One moment of supreme happiness we have, no doubt; and that is when we first think of a new picture—when we *create* it, and out of nothing, make something—but that moment is a short one, and is followed by weeks and months of hard, steady and difficult work.

Pictures (I mean *real* pictures, and not mere stupid transcripts of facts) have to be composed, balanced, studied. The artist's model you dear people speak about can only be used as helps towards the realisation of the imaginary creatures we desire to depict. True expression in the actions, pathos in the faces, smiles and tears, have to be evolved from the painter's brain. The production of even a bad picture is therefore of necessity a very serious and anxious thing.

But sketching out-of-doors implies none of these worries. Up in the morning early, after a sound breakfast the artist starts for his day's work. In one hand he carries his sketching-block or mounting-board, whilst the other flourishes his folded camp-stool. In such light marching-order (for heaviness of baggage spoils the whole fun) he plunges across the fields in search of a good "motif" for the day. The coolness of the night has brought out the thousand perfumes of the country-side; the dew is still heavy in the shadow of the tall hedges; birds are twittering all around; and the labourer, not recognising the implements of our trade, mistakes the sketcher for a gentleman and gives him a cheery "good morning."

For complete happiness, give me a small open space on the skirts of a deep wood, where pigeons coo the livelong day. The sense of peace is simply entrancing. Nothing stirs at first; but, by-and-bye, encouraged by the stillness, the tiny field-mouse emerges from his hiding-place and trots about unconcerned at one's very feet, and the squirrel squats within a yard's length of one's nose, and daintily sets to work on a new-found nut. A slight movement of the hand, an involuntary jerk of the foot, and P-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! they are gone! the field-mouse to some hole, the squirrel ten yards up a beech-tree. Not for long, however. Curiosity vanquishes Fear (capital subject for a painter of the Allegorical School), and after sundry hesitations,

sly peepings and short retreats, they return to keep the sketcher company.

And so, working leisurely and watching the inner-woodland life, the autumn day slips joyfully away. Should the sketch turn out, on inspection, to be a complete failure, it is soon torn into fragments and thrown under the grate. No bad sketch ever interfered with the night's sleep. The "fiasco" of to-day makes one all the more eager for the success of to-morrow.

But you will say, "Are there no drawbacks to that happy sketching time? No shadows to that idyllic picture?" Well, you see—y—y—yes! there are *some* shadows, no doubt. In chalk counties the "harvest bug" is most decidedly a shadow; a shadow that will crawl up one's legs at any hour of the day, and *not* always stop at the knee. In heathy counties, the midge is certainly a shadow; a shadow that creeps around the most delicate curves of the ear, and loves tender eyelids above all things. Again, in *all* counties the tramp is a shadow; a dirty, skulking and highly-flavoured shadow. Time is of no object to him; he would as lief stand or sit behind you for two hours as one. As a rule he does not speak—merely stands there. His presence so irritates the nerves, and the faint, sickly smell of his clothes so taints the air, that smoking soon becomes a necessity. He at once sees an opening, and begs a pipeful of tobacco. Glad to get rid of him at any price, one gives him a supply, and he starts on his idle tramp again.

These are *material* annoyances; they come, they go! The tramp goes first, the "midge" second, the "harvest bug" last of all; and they are all soon forgotten.

One annoyance of another kind always remains, however, and rankles in the sketcher's breast. Men of culture and taste often seek our society and our friendship; gallant soldiers have been known to speak to us; ladies of quite respectable connection (I have heard) have occasionally adored some fortunate members of our craft; but the horrible truth cannot be concealed that the artist is *not* looked up to by the agricultural population. He does *not* stand high in their esteem. Nay! I have sometimes thought that he stands very, *very* low!

In the rustic's eye, a travelling horse-dealer has a recognised and honourable profession; a cat's-meat man follows a tangible trade; a master chimney-sweep is a householder, who may some day rise to be a churchwarden. But a creature who fritters away his time sketching dilapidated barns and tumble-down cottages is a "déclassé;" a "loafer;" a poor feckless fool! And, mind you, courteous behaviour and quiet, friendly speech in no way improve our position with the natives. Our talk is not their talk; our jokes are not their jokes; our "indoor" voices are too low and gentle for rustic encounters.

The late E. M. Ward (the painter of the Last Sleep of Argyle) used

to relate with great glee, and with his extraordinary powers of mimicry, one of his sketching experiences.

E. M. Ward was a tall strong man of large limbs, and (in appearance at least) of great muscular power. Whilst he was sketching one day, a typical British farmer came and stood behind him ; silent of speech, but now and then giving vent to a loud snort. Ward, growing nervous under this treatment, looked up into the farmer's face, and, in his politest manner, said : " I hope I am not trespassing ? "

" Trespassing ? " said the farmer. " Trespassing ? I don't know about *tres*passing ! but why don't you go and *work*, you beggar ? You're strong enough—you're big enough—why don't you go and *work ?* " And with another indignant snort he strode away, leaving Ward speechless.

Scenes of a similar character take place on most sketching expeditions. Once, and once only, did the victory rest with me in one of these encounters.

I was working (in oil) inside the church of dear old Winchelsea. I sat in the aisle, near the alabaster tomb, and my subject was the Sedilia in the corner. Suddenly the big key grated in the lock, the heavy door swung round, and a number of people came in. Not a fashionable party from Hastings this time ; I could tell this much by their walk. No dainty pit-a-pat of small shoes, but the heavy tramping and squeaking of country-made boots. No gay chatter of indiscriminate gush over worm-eaten pews, but complete silence for awhile.

After a few minutes, however, one of the visitors began to ask short questions in a hard, sharp voice, that resembled a bark. I looked over my shoulder at the speaker, and took stock of him. He was a small, brisk man, with a fresh face, a turned-up nose, and bold eyes—evidently an impudent man. I classed him at once as an auctioneer and surveyor in a small country town ; a man accustomed to speak in public, and probably given to " shutting up " slow bidders. He was clearly the *esprit fort* of the party ; their mouthpiece ; his friends looked up to him, and expected much of him.

In due course they all came my side of the church, and gathered thick and close around me, the surveyor keeping his spirits up by slapping his right leg hard with his walking-stick. I was becoming impatient. Suddenly he tapped my canvas smartly and contemptuously with his stick, and said, in his loudest, and most bark-like voice :

" D'ye doo thaat by measure or by heye, young man ? "

I looked up into his face pleasantly, and with marvellous presence of mind and exquisite wit, replied :

" By heye ! "

To my intense surprise, the man was utterly floored. I cannot make out why to this day. Perhaps he had not expected such readiness and brilliancy of repartee on the part of a mere artist. Perhaps I

had unwittingly hit upon the kind of answer that was considered telling in his social circle. Anyhow, he simply walked away, humbled and crestfallen, his friends followed silently, evidently thinking much less of him. But that happened long, long ago. I was young then, and in full possession of my faculties. I could not rise to such a high level now!

That contempt for the sketcher is not exclusively an English feeling, but exists in other countries among the lower classes, the following sad story will show.

The worst fall I ever experienced was in artistic France, in comparatively recent and historic times. Do you remember a picture of mine called "Les Coquettes—Arles?" Three Arles girls walking arm-in-arm, giggling and pretending not to be aware of the presence of a handsome young Béarnais—who, for his part, struts and "peacocks" behind them quite unconscious of the excitement he is creating?

I knew exactly where my background was, and went to Arles to make a study of it. From the centre of the quaint old town, a narrow street runs up-hill. Near the top, and turning sharp to the right, is a narrower causeway that leads to the cloisters of St. Trophyme, and through the cloisters to the church.

The causeway has a high wall on one side, and a low parapet on the other; and many feet below the parapet are the remains of the Roman theatre. The semi-circular rows of stone seats are still there; broken, indeed, and decayed, but clearly traceable. Ruins of broken shafts lie about, half buried in the long, burnt-up grass; two columns alone are standing, rearing their heads into the clear blue sky.

This is the background I wanted. I began work the very next morning, my back to the high wall, and the low parapet opposite to me. It was a perfect day. The air was so still that the long brown grass never stirred. Silence reigned supreme. No impertinent sparrows frisked or chattered about. The French cannot afford to keep them; they eat them instead, roasted—ten of them strung on a wooden skewer, with little bits of fat bacon in between.

The lizards and I had the place all to ourselves; I working away for dear life, the lizards flashing across and over the parapet, apparently taking suicidal headers into the theatre below.

Gradually I became aware of a low musical sound far, far away. It was so faint that it was impossible to "put a name to it." It was a "sound," and no more. It ceased; then came again, stronger and clearer; evidently church music.

I was thinking of getting up and strolling into the church, when I saw the head of a procession on my left emerging from the steep street, and moving down my narrow causeway. On the procession came, nearer and nearer. Acolytes, with long silver crosses held up aloft; priests and choristers singing a solemn dirge; old-fashioned church instruments, called "serpents," sending forth deep, lugubrious

notes; officials, civil and military, surrounding the coffin, and holding the tassels of the rich velvet pall; the mayor of the town in his tri-colour scarf; the colonel of the garrison in full uniform, his broad chest glittering with medals and stars; the long line of mourners—all filed before me, with slow and solemn steps, as I stood there with head bent and bare in respect for the dead.

It all seemed like a dream, and moved me strangely. I felt that quiver of the nostril, that blanching of the skin, which come in moments of deep emotion. And I never stirred a muscle until the last mourner had passed, and the music had again fainted away in the distance.

I was preparing to resume my work, when a hideous figure came slouching up the causeway. The creature had "felon" written all over him. It was written in his shapeless, gaping shoes, in his baggy blue calico trousers, in his filthy blouse, hanging in shreds over his hairy wrists; most of all, in his low-typed face, with sloppy mouth, big jaws, and small hungry eyes.

He stopped in front of me, and, in vile French and husky voice, said: "What d'ye think of that?"

Unwilling to discuss the matter with him, I stupidly asked: "Who was it?"

His little, ugly eyes glittered, he craned his dirty neck towards me, and in an angry voice replied:

"Who was it? One of those money-grubbers, it was! One of those blood-suckers, it was! You don't suppose it was one of us, do you? When blackguards" ("canaille" was his word) "like *you* and *me* burst up, they chuck us into a hole. They don't make such a fuss about it as all that!"

And with a malignant scowl he lounged away in the wake of the procession.

Was it this sudden claim of kinship with the vile creature; this assumption on his part of perfect equality; was it only because I had never been called "canaille" before, and it takes some time to get accustomed to it? Whatever the cause, a shadow seemed to fall around me; the scene lost all its charm; the sky lost all its blue. That day I sketched no more.

"BOY'S LOVE" AND "OLD MAN."

By G. B. Stuart.

I.

"WHAT I say is," remarked young Biggs of the —th to his crony, Bostock, "when a girl is going on for thirty, and everybody knows it in a place like this, it must be doosed awkward!"

"But she can't be anything like that," said Bostock, who had only joined a short time before, and was not as well up in the ages of the Seamouth ladies as his friend. "She may be five-and-twenty, which is hard lines enough for a handsome girl with little White and Blue taking the shine out of her wherever she goes; but she can't be more."

"She's hard on thirty, I tell you. Why, Old Mavor remembers her grown up when White and Blue were in short frocks, and I've heard Fowler and half-a-dozen other men rave about her ever so long ago. Poor old Red! the twins cut her out entirely. I wonder"—reflectively and charitably—"she doesn't emigrate or take to sick nursing or something."

"She won't do that," said Bostock sapiently, longing to have his innings, and yet withholding his information to give it double importance. "She won't do that if Swanny means business, as I'm pretty sure he does. Here she comes, by Jove, down from the hill. And here's Swanny coming across the market square just as if he hadn't been hiding all the afternoon in Piles's shop, pretending to choose a new bridle and waiting to meet her promiscuous, as soon as ever she turned up. Now stay and see some fun!"

Both young gentlemen flattened themselves against the club window in anticipation of a treat, in which they, as well as Lord Alfred Swan, were doomed to be disappointed. For Miss Rose Grantham (familiarly known as "Red," while her sisters, Blanche and Violet, rejoiced in the nicknames of "White" and "Blue," a source of never failing amusement to the gallant —th), without pausing, or looking for more than a second in the young nobleman's direction, gave a very small bow and continued swiftly on her way.

Poor Lord Alfred stood stock still with outstretched hand, the other still grasping his lifted hat. Biggs and Bostock in the club window roared with laughter till the offensive sound was carried through the clear summer air to where their friend stood in the middle of the market square: who, becoming aware that his ruse and its discomfiture had been observed, crammed on his hat defiantly and dashed back into Piles's shop.

"By George, that was a joke! Never saw Swanny so at a loss in his life! Must go down to the tennis-ground and tell the fellows.

If he means business, the girl's on a new tack. You never can tell what they are after, and of course a girl of that age gets as wily as—as a widow."

"New tack!" sneered Bostock, as Biggs took up his racket and went out. "Why, that's the oldest tack of all, if a woman wants to land a fellow, and pretends not to see him and that sort of thing. Why, I've known it myself! Expect they both mean business from that!"

Miss Grantham was something better than a mere garrison hack, though it had been her misfortune to live from her earliest childhood in the *évidence* of a large military and naval station like Seamouth. The young men who laughed at her spinsterhood, and her five and twenty years—she was not older in spite of "Old Mavor" and his recollections—forgot or knew very little about her mother's long illness and death, which made a woman of poor Rose at fifteen; the early trials of housekeeping and hospitality when Colonel Grantham brought home an unexpected party of half-a-dozen guests to dinner without giving his inexperienced little daughter either warning or assistance; the education and care of Blanche and Violet which devolved upon her; and her own gradual shelving from public and private notice as these two young ladies blossomed out into beauties, and became the acknowledged belles of Seamouth.

Colonel Grantham, an easy-going man, with a sufficient income derived from a commissariat appointment, was fond enough of his daughters in his own way. He liked to find them pleasant, popular, always well-dressed; did not object to taking them out to evening parties, nor to making continual little parties at home to amuse them. They would marry, of course, in good time; girls did; but he did not want them to hurry into matrimony with any of the succession of lieutenants, naval and military, who always made the luncheon-table of the villa on the hill so lively. He was not the man to hurry his girls, and he liked to have them all about him, but he would have very little to leave them. Rose's partners, he fancied, had rather fallen off last winter; or those two pusses, the twins, had taken the wind out of her sails; so if Swan were in earnest, Rose had better think of it, and he would ask the young fellow up to dinner that very evening.

Lord Alfred Swan was the third son of the Duke of Poolborough to be sure, and rather a big fish for a Seamouth military family to tackle; but then Colonel Grantham had met His Grace somewhere, and knew him to be a quiet, unassuming gentleman, very much occupied in a scheme for introducing the bread-fruit tree into the west coast of Scotland, where he had some property. His younger sons had their mother's money, and were independent of him, the heir being already settled with a wife and family.

So Lord Alfred's doings were of comparatively small importance to the house of Poolborough. And "Swanny" himself was such a

determined little fellow, so bent on carrying through whatever he undertook, be it hurdle-races, theatricals, military duty or love-making, that it evidently lay in Rose's own hands to become Lady Alfred whenever she chose.

"And I won't have any shilly-shallying at her age," muttered the Colonel. "It's bad for the twins, and won't do in a woman who is not quite in her first bloom.—Hullo! Swan, is that you? Come up and dine with us to-night, will you? Haven't seen you for an age. Seven-thirty—sharp!"

Now we see pretty plainly how matters stood at Seamouth respecting Rose Grantham and her love affair. Public Opinion (represented by Biggs and Bostock) had declared itself. Parental consent was ready and waiting, while Lord Alfred's feelings may be guessed by the exuberant manner in which he accepted Colonel Grantham's impromptu invitation, after the misspent afternoon in Piles's shop.

Rose's own thoughts may not be so easy to come at; for though scarcely "as wily as a widow," to use the elegant simile of the far-sighted Biggs, she had yet learnt sufficient control of face and manners to baffle the crowd of curious onlookers, male and female, whose business it is in such places as Seamouth to see as much as possible of any games that may be going forward.

White and Blue were different. They were all smiles or frowns as the case might be, and as Lieutenant Smith or Captain Thompson deserved. Everyone might see in a moment, by the first shake of their fringy little heads, whether it was to be peace or war for the said gentlemen, whether the party was properly divided, or the cotillon conducted to their satisfaction.

But Rose had acquired something in her twenty-five years' residence in Seamouth which, be it "ease of manner," "want of feeling," or "affected nonchalance," as differently decided by her friends, at all events stood her in good stead when she had anything to keep to herself from Seamouth eyes.

She was suffering intensely now, as she walked, straight, tall, well dressed and self-possessed, across the market square, down some side streets and on to the country road, which, with an occasional glimpse of the sea on the right hand, goes straight into the loveliest and loneliest country in England.

She was not likely to meet anyone she knew, for all her world was at the tennis ground, whither White and Blue, under the charge of a dependable aunt, had driven their ponies an hour ago; and if any carriages met her turning her back on the town, there was always the explanation which she knew so well and had so often listened to so politely, "Of course you don't care so much for that sort of thing as the young girls. My Cecilia, or Kate, or Jane, is so devoted to tennis!"

All this was very bitter for the girl to bear who had known the intoxication of a first place in a very spirited society where men pre-

dominated, and who had gradually felt that place slipping from her; not from any falling off on her own part but because all popularity is short-lived, and the popularity of a military station is the most evanescent of all.

Her face and figure—though, to do her justice, she had hitherto thought very little about them—were not at all impaired by the great age she had attained; even "Old Mavor" and his contemporaries would allow that. She had scrutinised herself very carefully in the glass before coming out, and had come to that conclusion. And as she walked along the silent country road, her soft cream flounces and laces, the black velvet hat and crimson parasol, as dainty and lady-like as usual, she whispered again and again to herself: "I am not so altered but he must know me," with a tightening of the lips and a compression of the eyebrows which many people would have deemed impossible to the impassive Miss Grantham.

It was a relief to get away from the gaiety and bustle of the town into the quiet, sweet-scented country road, where it was possible to drop the mask of ready interest and acquiescence in everything, and look firmly in the face that fear which had stalked grimly behind her for nearly six years, and had now come up with her in all the hopelessness of certainty.

It was six years since Christopher Horton had sailed with his regiment for India; a little later in the year, however, than now, for Rose had been failing and looking pale after her summer's dissipation and the housekeeping anxieties; and Aunt Charlotte had carried her away to Tenby for change, in the St. Luke's summer of a fine October. So it came about that she was not at Seamouth to say good-bye to Captain Horton and the Royal Cambrians, who regretted it to a man, for Rose Grantham was in the zenith of her popularity then, and the gallant Cambrians were men of taste. I think they would have agreed that "the service is going to the dogs, sir!" had they seen Rose the subject of jest and comment from such youngsters as Biggs and Bostock. It was well for the latter that the Royal Cambrians and the degenerate —th were not in joint possession of the Seamouth Club.

People who wonder at everything, had wondered that the intimacy between Captain Horton and the Granthams had come to nothing. Rose wondered, too, as the days of that October went by at Tenby, and no one ever came to pick up the threads of an interrupted conversation, an incomplete explanation which she knew so well was fraught with life interests for herself and Christopher Horton. By-and-bye came one of her father's unsatisfactory, sketchy letters. "The Cambrians are off to a man. Even Horton, who I thought had quite concluded to accept the two years' home appointment at the depôt. He dined here with Clarkson and Vyner last night, and was very down in the mouth about leaving England. Sent kind regards, etc., for you. I hope he is not in any stupid scrape; looks

like it, this sudden change of plans. When are you coming home?" The letter concluded—"We all miss you, and shall want your opinion on the new fellows."

And this was the end of it! Rose Grantham at nineteen had still clung to some vague hope of a mistake or a misunderstanding, and had watched many mail steamers into the harbour, with ever fresh expectation of an explanation. But Rose Grantham at twenty-five, with six years' experience of Seamouth to mature her judgment, had scarcely felt surprised when her father had thrown down the homeward mail the evening before, announcing:

"You recollect Horton, of the Cambrians? This must be he. Colonel Horton, Mrs. Horton, three children, and ayah, by the *Syrian Queen*. Nice fellow, he was!"

And now the *Syrian Queen* was disembarking her passengers in Seamouth Harbour, as Rose, who was well up in all the comings and goings of ships, knew; and doubtless, Colonel Horton and his party would drive through the town to the station to catch the afternoon train to London. Perhaps he would even point out the road to the Hill and say to his wife: "That's where some people I knew lived. I used to flirt with the daughter!"

Poor Rose continued to aggravate her misery by touches of this sort; picturing a possible meeting, possible civilities which might have to be exchanged between Christopher Horton's wife and herself should the Colonel return to the depôt of his regiment; possible hospitalities at the Hill insisted on by her father.

The old days, the old walks and talks on the terrace which still bloomed with geranium and lobelia, as it had done in Horton's time, would surely rise up and cry shame to him—just as every familiar object in the Hill garden had spoken of hope to Rose Grantham when first she had known him. There was the sun-dial, a little mossier perhaps, where Rose and Christopher had cut their initials one lazy Sunday afternoon. She had seen the twins, and their usual court of admirers, and little Lord Alfred Swan doing just the same thing a day or two ago, and the scene had come back to her with an almost unbearable pain. Perhaps Colonel Horton would remember it, too, some day when their acquaintance was renewed, and might point it out to his wife as the spot "where Miss Rose and I used to sit and argue, about all things in heaven and earth." Of course, mentally adding: "Before I knew you, my dear."

No, Rose Grantham decided, she could not bear this, though she had learnt to bear a great deal in the last six years. And with this resolve, the natural, the only escape for her presented itself with the rapidity of a lightning flash: marriage with Lord Alfred Swan. "Little Lord Alfred," she and her sisters had always called him, and, however endearing the diminutive may sound from a man to a woman, it has scarcely the same significance when the sexes are reversed. Nevertheless, Lord Alfred had much to recom-

mend him ; and were Rose Grantham to accept him, there would probably be but one dissentient voice uplifted—that of her own heart.

As Rose turned and retraced her steps towards home, she was anxiously weighing all the pros and cons of the case, throwing whatever weight she could into the former scale, and placing her young suitor in every light that was most favourable.

He was a year or so younger than herself, and his extreme youthfulness of appearance and manner had, perhaps, led her into encouraging him at the Hill, and treating him as a pleasant young brother or cousin, and an agreeable swain for the twins. When Lord Alfred had begun to lay siege to Miss Grantham in form, the incorrigible White and Blue had laughed themselves nearly into hysterics of superior, sisterly discrimination, and declared that they had seen how it would be all along. "Swanny" had never cared a scrap about either of them. He was just the sort of boy to fall in love with a grandee like Rose. And Rose must take him, for she had encouraged him from the first; though apparently the dear old goose didn't know much about these things in practice, however ably she could lecture on them theoretically to other people.

Then poor Swanny himself began to change : to shroud himself in supernatural gloom and solemnity whenever he met Rose ; to hover in her neighbourhood with such portentous sighs and such studied indifference to the world at large, that even the self-possessed Miss Grantham was made nervous and uncomfortable, and, hazarding a few remarks, intended to be purely friendly or sisterly, found them received with such warmth of appreciation as left her more uncomfortable still.

There was much to like, perhaps for a younger girl to love, in the Duke of Poolborough's son besides his birth and position, which could not fail to tell in a society like that of Seamouth. He was merry, unaffected, and simple as a schoolboy, with a reverential regard for things and people he did not understand, which was irresistibly appalling.

" I don't know anything about that, I'm afraid ; by Jove, I wish you'd take me in hand, and teach me a little," he would say plaintively to Rose ; and then, perhaps, next day some chance allusion would reveal that he had been wading through the Debates, or looking up some historical reference, in place of falling back on the sporting novels, which had been his highest notion of mental food and exercise until lately.

Rose had rather shirked acknowledging to herself the power which she had established over him, though the signs of it grew every day more and more significant. But now, standing as she did before a shattered idol, in bitterness and humiliation, her young lover's devotion came to her mind as the only pleasant thing left upon the earth that was once all pleasantness. It could scarcely be called unfair to

him if she accepted the bargain which he was only too willing to make. She knew him well enough to be sure that, in offering her his love, he was humble enough to be content with a less ardent feeling on her part. He would willingly take *anything* she had to give; respect, liking, mere acquiescence even. And would not these, from the woman to whom he had given his full and first affection, be as good an exchange as the eager acceptance of his position and name which he would very likely meet with from some other girl were Rose to refuse him? She would, and she was sure she could, satisfy Lord Alfred, whose nature was to give enthusiastically. If she concluded the bargain, no one should have the slightest ground for dissatisfaction except herself, perhaps; for, in a matter of love, no woman is satisfied to give a half measure of affection, any more than to receive it, and can more easily put up with the latter condition than the former.

And as she argued this to and fro in her mind, she came to the open space which lies outside Seamouth town and leads to the station, and standing a moment by the roadway about to cross, there passed her a couple of slow-rolling, shabby Seamouth flys, piled with Indian luggage, deck-chairs, and all the paraphernalia of a journey; while an ayah's piteous face and figure was plainly discernible before Miss Grantham had time to lower the crimson parasol and shut out the commonplace little cavalcade.

"I could never face that," she said convulsively, hurrying on with wide-open eyes that saw nothing. And at that moment the thing was settled, and Rose Grantham mentally accepted Lord Alfred Swan.

II.

"I DON'T want any more chocolates unless you can find them with almonds in them. I'm tired of cream," Blanche Grantham was saying to Captain Thompson at dessert that evening.

Lord Alfred was dining at the Hill, and Thompson and Bostock had somehow joined the party too, having walked up with the girls from the tennis-ground.

Violet and Bostock were fighting their last "set" over again. It had been a capital meeting, and everyone had so much to say about it that there was no occasion, even for conversational purposes, to ask Rose where she had spent the afternoon. "Swanny" was smiling and incredulously content with Miss Grantham's manner, which was a return to the old, half-patronising, wholly charming interest in him, and his sayings and doings which had existed between them before he began to pose as a seriously-intentioned lover. He wondered whether she could possibly be sorry for the indifferent way in which she had cut him that afternoon; or whether by chance she had come to the knowledge of his painstaking study of Kinglake's "Crimean War,"

the result of a recent argument about modern warfare and politics between Colonel Grantham and his eldest daughter, during which poor "Swanny" had sat dumb and acutely conscious of ignorance; little guessing that the arguments which Rose adduced so cleverly were not the outcome of the "awful stiff reading" with which he credited her, but of similar conversations held years ago with Christopher Horton.

"Swanny" was lost in a maze of pleasant conjecture when his hostess gave the signal to retire, thereby frustrating Captain Thompson's generous intention of transferring all that were left of the chocolate bonbons to Blanche's pocket as soon as Aunt Charlotte's attention, on his other side, should be diverted. Bostock jumped up to throw open the door, with an especial grace and suppressed homage which he had practised, for Violet's subjugation, on his bedroom door in barracks; and the dinner came to an end.

"You might have the coffee put in the garden, my dear," cried Colonel Grantham after Rose. "I must go down and see Seaham for ten minutes at the club by-and-bye, but I shan't be gone half-an-hour. So don't finish it. I may bring him up with me, and then we can have a rubber."

The young men were all sufficiently at home to dispense with their host, and did not keep him long over the wine after this announcement. Each had his own object to further by rejoining the ladies; and the six young people paired off, very much as they had done at dinner, in the long sloping garden, leaving Aunt Charlotte in the verandah with an interminable mess of red knitting, to meditate, perhaps, on the possible advent of Dr. Seaham, an old comrade of the Colonel's.

Was it possible, Lord Alfred was asking himself, as he walked by Rose Grantham's side, that this wonderful, adorable creature was at last within his reach; that the longed-for opportunity was before him, and that he had only to speak? He felt his hands grow cold and his face grow hot at the bare idea, and he plucked nervously at the shrubs as they brushed against him. Far away—for the garden wound and sloped considerably for the grounds of a villa—he could hear the voices of the others. "Play!" and "Love All!" sounded derisively in his ears like cries from some other world; and had an authoritative voice at that moment announced to him that he was neither the Duke of Poolborough's son, nor an officer in Her Majesty's —th Regiment, he would have mildly acquiesced in both statements.

He and Rose were stationary by this time at the end of the long nut-walk which looks across the bay. Rose was very pale, and her hands were tightly twisted together; but when Lord Alfred, with a desperate courage, stood still in front of her and looked in her face for the first time, she gave him an encouraging smile. Her courage for the great resolve was unshaken.

"I did not mean to be rude this afternoon. I think the sun was in my eyes," she began, to break the embarrassing silence. "You are very good not to bear malice!"

She spoke at random to give herself and him time. She knew that the proposal was to come, but she wanted it to be made with all dignity as befitted a son of the Duke of Poolborough; and she liked the lad too well not to desire to do everything in her power to set him at his ease, having all a woman's horror of seeing her lover in a possibly ridiculous position.

"Malice!" echoed Swanny, catching at the word as an opening. "I assure you it was with a very different feeling that I came up here to-night. When I met your father, and he asked me to dinner, I was just in the most miserable state of uncertainty, wondering——"

"What the menu would be at mess, and whether our cook could bear the comparison?" finished Rose; "and eventually you decided to come here and give Martha an opportunity of distinguishing herself."

She was talking nonsense, she knew, but the situation was more trying than she had anticipated. Something in the young man's face, unusually pale and eager, made her suddenly think of him rather than of herself.

"I came here to try and get an opportunity for myself. I thought if you would let me come down into the garden with you ——"

"We might cut the lavender that is all going to seed. I have been meaning to do it for a week, and no one would volunteer to help me. Let us go in and get my garden scissors!"

No, she could not do him this great wrong! Better a hundred times the old Seamouth life with its daily annoyances, the dreams and memories of the Hill garden, which must be regarded henceforward as a childish romance; better, even, the presence of Christopher Horton and his wife, than the lifelong remorse of having sacrificed this generous boy to her pique. A few years hence someone would learn to love him for his own sake. Meanwhile, come what might, her conscience should be clear towards him. Every scent in the summer garden, every herb and flower had its recollections of her early girlhood, which meant its recollections of Chris Horton; but it was not of him nor of herself that she thought as she looked at the bright eyes and the imploring face of the young man before her.

"Rose, won't you give me a moment's hearing? You must know quite well what I have to say ——"

"Forgive me, forgive me! I cannot listen to you," she answered hurriedly, and the poor young suitor looked more perplexed than ever at the fervour with which she asked his pardon. Then gathering all her courage: "I will not pretend to misunderstand you; but

believe me, it will be better for both of us if you will leave what you have to say unsaid. Ah! here are papa and Dr. Seaham" (as two welcome forms loomed through the dim light at the end of the nut-walk): "I must go and see after the coffee."

She passed him quickly, and he was not sorry for the moment's respite in which to recover himself. For, though in after life Swanny used to tell himself and his wife that he had never really proposed to Rose Grantham, at that moment, standing forlorn in the Hill garden, he felt very much as if she had refused him!

It was not Dr. Seaham who followed Colonel Grantham down the garden path to meet Rose. Dr. Seaham was safely seated in the drawing-room, whither Aunt Charlotte had retired before the advance of those night dews which afforded her much alarm and conversation; and he was offering that lady some advice for her neuralgia with an assiduity not strictly professional.

As Rose came up, her father's voice broke the silence which seemed to have brooded upon the Hill garden that evening, and to have filled it with strange possibilities.

"I have brought an old friend home with me—Horton, who used to know you when you were a little girl!' and her hand and Chris Horton's met once again.

After that, for a few moments, she knew nothing of what was going on around her. The girls had come from the tennis-ground, and were laughing and introducing themselves and their companions. Someone noticed Lord Alfred, who stood a little apart.

"You are quite destroying that poor little bush," Violet cried to him; "cutting at it with a stick. It is a little delicate bit of 'boy's love,' which I have taken some pains to make grow, and now you have almost beaten it down!"

Then seeing his woe-begone look, she spoke more kindly.

"Come and make friends with this new man" (a panacea for all troubles in Violet's opinion). "He knew us when we were so high," saucily imitating her father's voice and gesture; "and never mind the 'boy's love'; it is sure to grow all right again."

But Swanny refused to be comforted, and went sadly away to barracks so early in the evening, that if Colonel Grantham's attention had not been diverted by his old friend Horton's coming, he must have noticed it and guessed the reason, as "White" and "Blue" did very speedily.

These young ladies very soon made up their minds about Horton, and pronounced upon him to each other. "Nice looking, just what a colonel should be, but rather too quiet and fogyish. Rose can talk to him," and returned to the society and entertainment of Bostock and Thompson, who, during their temporary eclipse, had been savagely knocking about the tennis balls, and inveighing in dark and mysterious language against old friends who knew people when they were "so high." But the return of the twins, having

weighed their old friend in the balance, and so obviously found him wanting, restored their good humour.

"You know what a colonel is!" Blanche said, in such a confidential way, that they both at once felt the advantage of *not* being field officers.

To Rose, it was all like a dream. On the very spot where, not half an hour before, she had stood with Lord Alfred, and had suddenly faced all the long future which she proposed to live as his wife, Christopher Horton was telling her of the six years of his past life, in the old, well remembered voice, which of itself seemed to annihilate all past sorrow. It was a sad story, and an involved one, though Chris Horton touched as lightly as possible on the brother's extravagance, treachery and ruin which for a time had overshadowed his own life, crippled his resources, and threatened to stain his name with reproach.

"He is dead now," Colonel Horton ended. "I did his last bidding to-day when I made over his wife and children to the care of her relations, who came down to Seamouth to receive her. And then I was free to take up my own life again, and my first impulse was to come here. Rose, do you remember where we broke off, six years ago, when you went away to Tenby, and I first heard of poor Ted's misfortunes, and was obliged to go out with the regiment and see what could be done for him? I heard of you sometimes after that, when fellows came out who had been at Seamouth, but I never could have seen you again unless I had cleared our name from all this miserable business. Thank God that has been done, though it has left me a poor man, and an old man, scarcely a fit mate for such a blooming rose."

But Rose Grantham had no fears on this score; and as she listened to Chris Horton's honest, tender wooing, she was filled with a great thankfulness that she had not succumbed in the hour of temptation; that she could still count her faithfulness worthy of this brave man's love.

By-and-bye, strolling homewards through the dusky summer night, they came to the garden corner where poor Lord Alfred's little shrub lay battered and broken.

Rose knelt down, with a feeling of tenderness she could hardly have explained, and cleared the plant of its snapped branches, setting it firmly in the earth again, and building the soil round its stem.

"What is it?" Horton asked, holding out his hand for a piece.

"'Boy's Love;' we used to call it 'Old Man' when I was at home."

"Oh, Rose, Rose, there's an allegory for you! Are you sure you know what you are accepting?"

But Rose declared she was quite content.

PEARLS.

By Alexander H. Japp, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

IN one of the finest passages in the "Paradise Lost," Milton painted the throne on which Satan sat, "by merit raised to that bad eminence," as outshining the "wealth of Ormuz and of Ind," and described the gorgeous East as with richest hand showering on her kings "barbaric pearl and gold."

What might seem at the first glance somewhat out of keeping, on a more close examination only attests the exactitude of Milton's knowledge. For it might be asked why pearls are here alone associated with gold? Are there not rubies and emeralds, opals and diamonds, and sapphires, and the topaz, the beryl and the chalcedony, and the turquoise, and the onyx, and the jaspar, and the carbuncle? These are all more gorgeous than the pearl; and if the marks of barbaric taste are, as is usually assumed, flash of colour, and variety, and radiance, then surely is the pearl the very last of gems to be so chosen out and celebrated.

Barbaric *pearl* and gold!

At first sight the words seem to be contradictory; in the subdued colour and modest purity of the pearl there is nothing of "barbaric gorgeousness." In most regions of the East, however, and particularly in Persia, in ancient times the pearl was ranked the first of all gems; and no end of legend and myth was associated with it. Even in India, which furnishes a partial exception, as putting first the diamond, the Hindoos endowed Vishnu with the special honour of having created pearls; and all their gods are so richly decorated with pearls as to have awakened in the minds of many travellers no little surprise and admiration.

Egyptians, Babylonians and Assyrians, as well as Persians, held them in the highest esteem, and the ancient Mexicans were in no whit behind in their appreciation and reverence. The palace of Montezuma, we read, was studded with pearls and emeralds, and the Aztec kings possessed specimens of pearls of the utmost value, got, as is believed, from the pearl fisheries of Panama.

In the barbaric East, therefore (for India was even in those days hardly barbaric), the pearl took precedence of all other precious stones; and Milton was quite right when he spoke of the gorgeous East, with richest hand showering on her kings "barbaric pearl and gold."

The ancients do not seem to have had any clear conception of the natural process by which pearls are produced, and it is possible enough that they would have rejected it even had it been made known to them. Greeks and Romans, so far as we can ascertain, were

in this no whit in advance of Egyptians, Persians, and Babylonians. Even in the days of Pliny, men's ideas were vague enough on this subject as on many others which science has made plain. One can hardly restrain a smile as one reads these words of Pliny, whom moreover, one could hardly wish to have been deceived, such a pretty poem has he made of it.

"Pearls," says he, "are great or small, better or worse, according to the quantity and quality of the dew they received. For if the dew were pure and clear that went into them then were the pearls fair and orient; if thick and troubled, then the pearls likewise were demure, foul and dullish; whereby, no doubt, it is apparent and plain that they participate more of the air and dew than of the water and sea, for according as the morning is fair so are they clear; otherwise, if it be misty and cloudy they will be misty and thick in colour. Cloudy weather spoiled their colour, lightning stopped their growth, and thunder made the shell-fish miscarry altogether, and eject hollow husks called *Physemata* or bubbles."

To turn from the fancy and romance of the ancients to the sober facts of nature is only to find a truer romance.

The pearl is simply a secretion of the common substance, carbonate of lime, which is drawn in by the oyster from the water, and employed, mixed with some fluid proper to itself, and along with some extremely thin, almost transparent membrane, in forming the lining of its shell.

What is called the mantle of the bivalve is the medium of this secretion. The peculiar nacreous lustre, the soft, shimmering, subdued gleam, is caused by these being laid on alternately in exceedingly thin layers in slow succession; these layers not being absolutely smooth, but having a gentle, almost unnoticeable series of waves or undulations, which are easily detected by scientific instruments, and are invariably present. This is so certain, says a good authority, Mr. Hugh Owen, that "a similar nacreous lustre has been produced on buttons by engraving a steel die with a diamond point in a regular series of undulating lines, and then striking the button as a coin would be struck."

The gem is due either to some wound, which throws off osseous particles, or to some irritating substance, such as a grain of sand finding its way within the shell, against which the oyster fortifies itself by wrapping it round in layer after layer of the same substance as that with which it lines its shell. In the centre of every pearl, it is said by scientific men, there will be found in cutting it some such particle as this.

The creature thus translates the cause of its pain or discomfort into a beautiful object, which has given rise to many fine thoughts and images; and none, perhaps, is finer than that of Jean Paul Richter, the great German romance writer, when he says: "Afflictions and disappointments to the true character are only means to its

beautifying and perfecting, as the oyster, when it is injured, closes the wound with a pearl."

The knowledge of this fact has led to no end of ingenuity in introducing particles of various kinds within the shell of the bivalve. The Chinese perhaps have outstripped all others in this clever device. They introduce minute images of their gods, and grotesque figures of animals, into the open shell of the Chinese mussel, which, after a certain time, are found coated over with the secretion we call mother-of-pearl. They are then withdrawn, and find ready sale; some of them being of considerable value. But though much has been made clear regarding the circumstances of production, there are points still unsettled. The bivalves abound; but they do not equally produce pearls in all localities. The most probable explanation is that the chemical constituents of the water have much to do with it, and, of course, they vary indefinitely—not only in different waters, but in the same waters at different times.

There are several species of bivalves which produce pearls. From that named *unio margaritiferus* we derive our supply in Britain; while the pearl mussel—*meleagrina margaritifera*—is the source of the Oriental supply. Those derived from others are of little or no value, and vary in colour from pinky-purple to rose-colour, some being almost black. The British pearl-producing bivalve is found in some of the mountain streams of England and Wales, and more abundantly in some of the mountain streams of Scotland; but, seeing that out of every hundred bivalves opened there may be found only one pearl, and even that of little value, it may be guessed that pearl-fishing in our country can hardly be a very profitable calling; though it must be said that, owing to a passion for rose-coloured pearls which set in among the ladies of Paris a few years ago, some good has been done to the Scotch pearl fisheries; for pearls of a rose-colour are more frequently found there than elsewhere.

Many and varied, too, are the methods which have been adopted for the securing of these precious gems.

One of the earliest Arab geographers in the ninth century describes the habits of the pearl divers with which he was acquainted. They filled their ears with cotton and oil, and compressed their nostrils with tortoiseshell before they dived: this practice, we believe, continues among the pearl-divers of the Persian Gulf even to the present day.

Sir J. Emerson Tennant, in his interesting description of the pearl fisheries of Ceylon, gives some very instructive details. The diver inserts his foot in a sinking stone and inhales a full breath. He presses his nostrils with his left hand, raises his body as high as he can above the water to gain impetus in the descent, and the stone being at that moment liberated, he sinks rapidly to the bottom. As soon as this is reached, the stone is drawn up; and the diver, having thrown himself on his face, with all alacrity fills his basket. At a

given signal this is drawn up by the cord which is attached to it, and held above by the men in the boat; and the diver assists his ascent by springing on the rope as the basket rises.

The divers remain about fifty-five seconds under water; and accidents are rare. The noise and constant excitement of the water, during the fishing season, is found to be quite sufficient to protect the men from the sharks; and it may be that additional confidence is given to the men by the fact of a shark-charmer being present in each boat!

The shells are taken out and thrown upon the shore, and as soon as the animals are dead, the pearls are easily extracted. The thickest and finest shells are carefully selected from the mass, and are destined to be worked out for mother-of-pearl. The more worthless are left, and groups of the poorer people may be seen turning and turning them over in the hope of finding some stray pearl that may have been overlooked.

Pearls have had their own share in determining the history of the world.

There is no doubt that Julius Cæsar found his main inducement to visit Britain in the reports of great pearls to be found there. He is mentioned to have been seen weighing British pearls in his hand, and comparing them with others from the East a short time before his expedition to our Islands was undertaken. We know that he shared to the full the Roman love of pearls. On his return to Rome from these Islands the breast-plate which he dedicated to the Venus Genetrix was formed from pearls taken from British waters.

We have thus conclusive proof of two things: (1) That Cæsar's main aim was not forgotten in the midst of the warlike and imperial ambitions which in the Romans always mixed with and modified any personal or narrower preference; and (2), that the ancient Britons knew the value of pearls and worked their waters for them, that they traded in them, and that they found their way to distant regions of the earth even at that early period. But pearl fishing was for a long course of centuries in abeyance in our country.

The revival of the pearl fishing in Scotland is of comparatively recent date. In 1761, pearls were sent from Scotland to London to the value of £10,000, and these were mainly taken from the Tay and Isla. And year by year the trade languished until an Edinburgh jeweller of enterprise made the generous offer to purchase all that were brought to him. The highest price given for a single pearl has not, so far as we know, exceeded £60.

Endeavours have been made to imitate pearls, just as endeavours have been made to manufacture diamonds, but not with much success. Nor is this anything new. The Romans and other early nations of Europe endeavoured to unite and file pieces of shell into the form of spherical pearls; but no one of the least skill or judg-

ment was likely to be deceived by them, though as ornaments they no doubt had their claims.

In 1680, Jacquin, a rosary maker of Paris, filled hollow glass beads with the scales of a small river-fish (the bleak), putting them through some process of condensation, and since then the world has been at no loss to procure what superficially passes for beads and pearl-necklaces.

No city in the world, we read, was ever richer in precious pearls than Rome in the time of the Cæsars. Special mention is made of Lollia Pollena, wife of Caius Caligula. "I have seen her," says Pliny, "so bedecked with emeralds and pearls disposed in rows, ranks and courses, one by another, round about the attire of her head, her cowl, her peruke of hair, her band grace and chaplet, hanging at her ears, round her neck as an ornament in a carcanet, upon her wrists as bracelets, and on her fingers in rings, that she glittered and shone like the sun as she went." The habit was so common of using pearls as a base to throw up the brilliance of other gems, that we may, perhaps, believe even in Caligula's slippers of pearls, with rubies and emeralds set upon them like flowers.

The Roman ladies had a special favour for pearls as ear-rings, and it was one of their consuming ambitions to possess exceptionally fine specimens for this purpose. They preferred the pear-shaped pearls, and often wore two or three of them strung together. They jingled gently as they moved about, fitting accompaniment, it may be said, to their graceful movements, and from this jingling they got their name, which was *crotalia*, or "rattles."

And the taste of the Roman ladies for pearls has perpetuated itself, though other of the ancient luxurious habits, which in their case accompanied it, have long died out. The women of Florence even now are not contented if they do not possess a necklet of pearls, and this generally forms the marriage portion of the middle-class women. It is thought, just as it was in ancient Rome, that this gives an air of respectability, and forms a sure protection from insult in the streets or elsewhere.

Pearls are only twice mentioned in the authorised version of the Old Testament, and both times it is used as a symbol of wisdom.

Some critics have held that the Hebrew word did not exactly mean pearl, but since there can be no doubt that our Saviour referred to the true pearl when he spoke of the "pearl of great price," we may the more implicitly accept it, and gather from the use of the pearl as a figure by the Jewish writers that a perfect pearl has been rare in all ages, and considered of the greatest value.

As may be presumed, from what we have just said, the Romans classed first among pearls those which were pear-shaped, and gave to them the name of *unio*, or unique, a name now in our scientific terminology attached with fitness, as we have seen, to the species of mollusc from which some of the most perfect pearls are obtained.

"To be perfect," says Mr. Emmanuel in his valuable work on gems, "a pearl must be of perfectly pure white colour; it must be perfectly round or drop-shaped; it must be slightly transparent; it must be free from spots or blemish; and it must possess the lustre characteristic of the gem."

At the breaking up of the crown-treasury of France in 1791, a magnificent large spherical pearl, unbored, was sold for £8,000; and two pear-shaped ones, which each weighed 214 grains, were valued at £12,000. Another famous pearl of history was that sold to Philip the Fourth of Spain in 1625. It is said that the Shah of Persia is the happy possessor of a pearl valued at £60,000—a goodly estate in small compass, light and portable—and the Imam of Muscat one for which he has been offered £30,000.

The second division in the Roman classification of pearls was "Margarites," which included pearls of any shape or colour, large and mis-shapen often, but often, too, of exceptional purity and beauty. The jewellers of the Cinque-Cento period, with the fertile ingenuity that distinguished them, gave a new value to these eccentric specimens by mounting them in styles as eccentric. Mermaids and sea-monsters were favourite designs; and some illustrations of this treatment are to be seen in collections in this country, notably in the Devonshire Cabinet.

Unlike most gems, the pearl comes to us fresh, pure, lustrous, direct from the hand of nature. Other precious stones undergo much careful labour at the hands of the lapidary, and sometimes owe much to his art. Diamond-cutting is indeed a branch of art, and cameo-carving is a yet higher one. But the pearl owes nothing to man.

This perhaps has a good deal to do with the sentiments we cherish toward it. It touches us with the same sense of simplicity and truth as the mountain daisy or the wild rose. It is absolutely a gift of nature's own. When we turn from the brilliant, dazzling coronet of diamonds or emeralds to a necklace of pearls, there is a sense of relief, of soft refreshment. The eye rests on it with quiet, satisfied repose. It seems so truly to typify steady and abiding affection, which needs no accessory or adornment to make it more attractive.

But pearls, despite all this, are not free from the fluctuations of fashion and caprice which assail all such commodities.

We have seen how for some years the Scottish fisheries have been affected by the craving for rose-coloured pearls among the ladies of Paris. And different people in this, as in so many other things, display varying tastes and tendencies. The Chinese prefer those of a yellow tint—a dark gold colour—as one describes it. This tint is peculiar to certain classes of Oriental pearls. Those found in Panama, California and the South Pacific are more or less dark-looking.

Pearls are pre-eminently children of the light. Not only do they reflect it, but, like flowers, they lose their purity and delicacy of

colour if light is for any lengthened period withdrawn from them. So say they who have had most experience of pearls; and the fact adds a new association and poetic suggestiveness, as it were, affording another very beautiful hint of distinction between them and other gems of purely mineral origin. Those who possess fine pearls had better not forget this, and keep them too long immured in dark and secret corners, however safe. Pearls, we may say, were created to diffuse gentle pleasure, to delight the eye, as they shine simple and translucent.

We have all heard of that draught in which it was said that Cleopatra dissolved her famous pearl, and which she drank at that memorable supper. But science gives the lie to the possibility. No acid the human stomach could receive would be sufficient to dissolve a pearl, and even with the acids of the greatest strength the outer coatings are alone discoloured or destroyed, and this only after a considerable lapse of time. As has been suggested by a very good authority on gems—Mr. King—it is likely that Cleopatra swallowed the solid gem, or found some other means of eluding the vigilance of Antony and those who were with him. Some cynics would say that woman's wiles were quite equal to that enterprise or deception.

References to pearls by great writers, ancient and modern, are very plentiful, as the beauty and purity of the gem would lead one to expect.

We have referred to some of the expressions of Scripture; and we have seen how Pliny viewed the matter, giving in compact version the very unfounded theory of the Romans as to the origin and growth of the pearl. Now that science has taught us better, literature has only found in it, as is invariably the case, a wider field of illustration and imagery. The very associations inseparably linked with the name Margaret, which is only an adaptation of the Greek for pearl, might themselves be cited here. We think of one named Margaret as pure, guileless, untouched with the *finesse* of society, as unspotted by its vices. Something of this Goethe may have had in his mind when he named the heroine of "Faust" Gretchen or Margaret.

Wordsworth, too, makes one of the most touching episodes in the "Excursion" to circle round an ill-fated but noble Margaret. Tennyson, in what is, perhaps, the very finest of his elaborate cabinet of female portraits, painted when he was still a young man, has given us "Rare, pale Margaret," and this is, perhaps, the finest of them all. Othello, in his last touching speech, speaks of himself as

> "One, whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe."

To him Desdemona was Margaret—a pearl. He could not otherwise have so truly and concisely expressed himself.

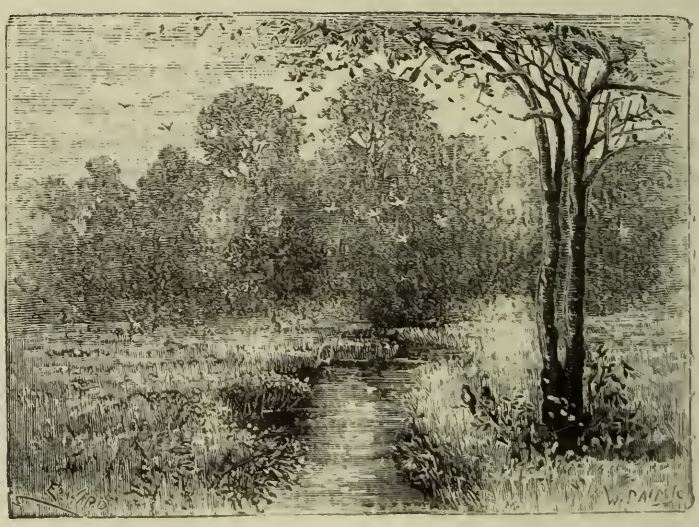
Herrick is not to be outdone by any in his own line. In the midst of his quaint conceits about Julia, he has this verse:—

"Some asked how Pearls did grow and where?
Then spoke I to my Girl
To part her lips, and showed them there
The quarelets of Pearl."

The old fable of pearls being generated by contact with rice, and actually revived not long ago, is only a monstrous imposture. Mr. Hugh Owen has thus disposed of it :—

"The so-called rice is a marine shell of the genus *cypræa*, the end or apex of each example carefully filed or ground off to represent the effect of having been fed upon by the pearls. The whole is a deliberate and barefaced imposture, and it is to be hoped that when some generations hence this miserable myth again crops up in the repetitive operations of history, some more powerful pen than mine may find employment in denouncing the shameless attempt to impose upon the credulity of the scientific world."

Hypocrisy was said by the witty Frenchman to be the tribute vice pays to virtue. Such imitations and impostures are the respect which Fraud pays to Nature's unsullied Beauty.



A DOCTOR'S STORY.

CROFT HOUSE, at the end of the village, that had stood vacant so long, was let at last. A ladder leaned against the wall; a painter was painting the shutters, a gardener digging in the garden.

Day by day the aspect of the place improved. Soft muslin shades shrouded the windows, flowers bloomed where only weeds had grown; the garden paths were laid with gravel. One night a travelling carriage was driven rapidly through the village and in at the gate leading to Croft House.

Whence came the vehicle? Who its occupants? No one knew, but everyone desired to know. Nothing that took place within that dwelling transpired outside. In passing by, one saw only that the standard roses flourished and that the grass grew greener. What comments were made on the mysterious and invisible inhabitants! What strange tales circulated!

I, the village doctor, concerned myself little enough about the matter. The occupants of Croft House were no doubt human beings, and as such must suffer some of the ills that flesh is heir to; in that case my services would be required. I waited patiently.

A week went by; and one morning before I set off on my rounds, a messenger arrived requesting me to call on Mr. Wilton of Croft House. Dressing myself with more than ordinary care, I crossed the village green. I was young, and felt important.

I was shown into the drawing-room. It was gay with summer flowers, redolent of their perfume. On a couch lay a young girl, in appearance almost a child. She was pale, delicate looking, and very lovely. In front of her knelt a young man of two or three and twenty —one of the handsomest young fellows I had ever seen. He held the hands of the beautiful girl, and they were looking into each other's eyes. As I approached he rose, bowed, and welcomed me with an easy grace that won my heart.

"I confess I expected to find the village doctor an older man," he said with a frank smile as he offered me his hand. "It is for my wife I desired your attendance," he continued, looking at her with the deepest affection. "Una is not strong."

Then at a sign from him, I sat down beside the couch of my interesting patient.

"You are very young, Mrs. Wilton," I remarked. It was certainly rather a leading question.

"I am seventeen, doctor," she answered simply. "We have been married only a few months. We are strangers here, and wish to be so. Oh, Charlie, please explain," she asked, turning to her husband with a faint blush. "You can do it better far than I."

He bent over her, kissed her on the forehead, then straightening himself and looking at me, said: "In attending my wife, Dr. Gray, I must ask you to undertake a double duty. We have decided to tell you our secret—in part—so that while *we* are your patients, I trust we may look upon *you* as our friend—one who will assist us in keeping our secret and in living the entirely secluded life we desire to lead here. Wilton is an assumed name. My father refused to acknowledge my marriage with the girl I love. *Her* father withheld his consent to his daughter marrying into a family too proud to receive her. We would have waited any reasonable time; but, when our parents sought to separate us entirely, we took our lives into our own hands. We married, and hope—in time—to be forgiven."

They had both spoken to me with the candour of youth, of love, and of inexperience. It takes very little sometimes to bring a doctor into close relations with his patients. I seemed to become the friend of this interesting young couple at once. I assured them they need not fear being intruded upon by the villagers, and the only gentlemen's residences within calling distance were tenantless at that season of the year, the owners either being up in London or travelling abroad. As to the vicar, he was a man whose advanced age and infirmities effectually precluded him from visiting more than was absolutely necessary among his parishioners.

"If you go to the church—a mile from here," said I, "he may or may not call upon you. If you do not go, I think I may safely say he will not consider it necessary. In that case you will probably never meet."

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton thanked me warmly, pressing me to come to see them frequently, which I did with ever-increasing pleasure as the beautiful romance of these two loving hearts unfolded itself. I soon discovered that Mr. Wilton had received a college education; I also gleaned that "Una" was somewhat his inferior in social position, and that since their runaway marriage they had been travelling abroad. It was no business of mine to know more than they chose to tell. I respected their secret, and asked no questions.

One morning—my visits had become almost daily now—I saw at once that there was something wrong with Mrs. Wilton, and she saw also that I perceived it.

"You need not feel my pulse, doctor; it is my heart," she said in answer to my looks. "You will think me foolishly weak, I know," she added, forcing a smile, "but I am miserable because my husband is going to leave me."

"Leave you! For how long?" I inquired anxiously.

She blushed, and, looking down, answered shyly: "Till this evening. Ah, don't laugh," she implored; "we have never been separated for so long since we were married. I am nervous and fanciful, I suppose, but I scarcely slept last night for thinking of it, and when I did, a dreadful dream kept repeating itself——"

"Oh, you must not mind dreams," I answered.

"I never did much before, but this—ah, Charlie!" she cried, as Mr. Wilton came in booted and spurred, "I will come and see you mount."

I saw the parting from the drawing-room window where I stood—saw her husband place his hands on either side of the sweet face, and gaze down into it with a look of unutterable love; saw their lips meet together for a moment; after that he kissed her forehead and her beautiful fair hair, then sprang into the saddle, and rode off swiftly as though he could not trust himself to linger longer. At the gate, turning, he waved a last farewell.

She came into the drawing-room presently.

"Doctor, excuse me. I think I will lie down," she said, her large blue eyes looking peculiarly plaintive, brimming as they were with tears. My presence was not needed then. I bowed and took my leave

But the evening of that day I was sent for to Croft House.

"He has not returned," were the first words spoken by Mrs. Wilton, as I entered the drawing-room. "And, oh! what a day it has been," she continued feverishly; "so long, so sad! I seem to have lived a cruel lifetime in each hour."

"But it is not late. You said Mr. Wilton would not return till evening," I urged.

"It has been evening a long time now. See, the sun is setting. Then it will be night." She shuddered.

I sat with her an hour, perhaps, trying in vain to distract her thoughts. And I too—knowing not how or why—became uneasy. She told me her husband had gone to D——, the nearest town, for letters he expected to find at the post-office. I knew that I could have ridden there and back easily in the time. Still, a thousand simple causes might have delayed him. I begged her to take courage, suggesting she would probably laugh to-morrow at the fears she had entertained to-day. But she shook her head.

"I suffer too much ever to laugh at such feelings as these," she said in a half-whisper. "I do not wish to think it, but it is as though I *knew* something dreadful was —— Oh, I cannot, I dare not clothe the terrible thought in words. That would make it seem so real—so almost certain. Dr. Gray, can this be the punishment for my disobedience—*come so soon?*" she asked in awestruck tones.

I could not answer her, but proposed that she should wrap a mantle round her and come with me into the garden to watch for her husband. She thanked me gratefully, and I carried a basket seat out for her and placed it on the lawn.

Sitting with her hands clasped about her knees—paler, more fragile, more childish looking than I had ever seen her—of a sudden I felt, rather than saw, that a change had come to her. She bent forward as though listening intently, and at the same moment a

distant sound struck on my ear—the galloping of a horse on the high road.

Was there ever before on human countenance such a beatified expression as that which dawned and deepened on Mrs. Wilton's as the sound approached? It was close to us now, but the trees in the garden hid the road from our view. Without slackening speed the horse galloped in at the open gate.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! Oh, thank God!" cried the girl, in what seemed a wild, ungovernable ecstasy of gratitude and joy. But I pulled her back or the horse would have been upon her.

Then I saw that the animal was riderless, covered with dust and foam; that the bridle hung loose, dragging on the gravel.

A groom who had been on the watch came out. In another moment all the household were assembled on the lawn.

Mrs. Wilton had fallen back, as I thought fainting, in my arms. But no, her senses had not forsaken her. She raised herself and pointed in the direction the horse had come.

"He lies there, there!" she cried, and pushing me from her, ran forward towards the gate. I bade the servants bring lanterns and follow me. To Mrs. Wilton, who was out in the road by this time, I said all I could say to dissuade her from going with me; but my words fell on deaf ears. Feeling it was useless—in one sense cruel—to persist, I compelled her to take my arm. Endowed for the time, by excitement, with almost superhuman strength, she seemed to drag me forward rather than to lean on me. After proceeding about a mile, we came to a bit of level road which for some distance in front showed clear and distinct in the moonlight. Here, I felt certain, we had lost all trace of the horse's shoe marks, which hitherto had been every now and again perceptible in the dusty highway.

"There is a shorter cut—if he knew of it," I said, and stopped.

"Then if there is he would come by it—he would be sure to find out and come by it," she cried.

And I led her back a little distance to a gate at the entrance of a wood, where sure enough were traces sufficient to show we were again on the right track. Servants with lanterns had overtaken us by this time; so, calling out at intervals and listening in vain for a response, we entered the dark wood. Through it was an almost unfrequented bridle path, considered somewhat unsafe by day but particularly so at night; the gnarled roots of trees forming a raised network upon the ground. It was with considerable difficulty we made our way. Mrs. Wilton stumbled many times, would have fallen but for my support. At last she loosed my arm and ran forward, signing me not to follow her. In another moment the wood resounded with a wild and piercing cry. She had seen what the rest of us had failed to see, and when I came up to her she was kneeling beside her husband, her arms clasped about his neck, her face close pressed to his. One agonised

look she gave me as I bent over them: "My dream!" she said. I understood.

There was an ugly wound on the back of poor Charlie Wilton's head; the body was still warm, but the heart had ceased to beat. Though Mrs. Wilton did not speak again, she never completely lost her senses, but her mind seemed stunned. We put some hurdles together and carried him back thus to Croft House.

An inquest was held, every particular of which was minutely reported in the county newspaper, to appear in condensed form in most of the journals of the day. But no friends of the dead man ever came forward, nor was it satisfactorily proved whether his death had been the result of violence or of an accidental fall from his horse in the dangerous pathway through the wood.

The post office officials at D—— perfectly remembered the deceased calling for letters on the day in question, giving the name of Wilton; but there were none for him. In the bank was lodged to his credit some five or six thousand pounds.

I took upon myself the arrangements for the funeral as of everything else. Mrs. Wilton's mind had not sufficiently recovered from the shock it had received on that terrible night to understand or care for what went on around her. Only once—when I urged writing to her friends—did she even momentarily rouse herself to answer me. "My father will never forgive me," she said. "I acted in defiance of his commands. No, I cannot write to him." Then she added: "He has married again," which perhaps in part explained.

A month later a baby was born—a boy whom she called Charlie—and when she spoke the name, tears sprang to her eyes for the first time. It was not until I saw those tears that I had the slightest hope of her mind rallying from the shock; but then I knew that the living child would save her. She looked upon him as having been sent direct from heaven to solace her for her loss. She regarded him as an emanation from the departed spirit of her husband. There was certainly something uncommon about the child. He was pretty, but not engaging. He never cried; but it may also be said, he never smiled. He did not suffer, but there was about him none of the joyousness of childhood. It seemed as though the thunder-cloud that had burst over the mother's head had left its shadow on the child.

Between two and three years after Mr. Wilton's death a change seemed likely to occur in my own prospects. A rich relation—a physician of high standing—wrote urging me to come to London immediately, on a matter, so he said, of the greatest importance to myself. There was nothing to prevent my complying with his request. The village was in a healthy state; my outside practice might be made to spare me. I wrote stating I would be with him on the following day.

I went to Croft House to say good-bye. It was summer. Mrs.

Wilton was sitting out on the lawn with Charlie on a rug close at her feet. She made room for me beside her, and we talked together for a short time of her affairs and of the child. It was not until I had risen to go that I broached the subject of my departure. She looked surprised, alarmed.

"But, Charlie," she said; "if he should be ill?"

"I would not go if he were ill. I will return at once if he should need me," I answered earnestly. "But is he not the picture of health? Why, he seems exempt from every childish trouble."

I told her my relative's address, knowing she only cared to have it in case she needed me for her boy; then I lifted the child in my arms and kissed him. "Good-bye, little man!" I said cheerfully. He was a splendid little fellow, of whom his mother might well be proud; he resembled his father, too, and was growing more like him every day.

I was about to set the child down, but something—some feeling I cannot define—impelled me to hold him closer; to look into his face—his eyes—more scrutinisingly than I had ever done. And so looking, I shuddered at the thought that then assailed me. Great powers! Could fate be so cruel? Had heaven no pity for this poor mother who, so young, had already surely borne enough of sorrow? I put the boy down quickly and turned away.

Perhaps—perhaps after all I may have been mistaken!

I reached London, and Dr. B——'s residence that evening, and my worthy relative quickly explained the object of his summons. He wished me to undertake, with his supervision, a case requiring the utmost care and consideration; one which rendered it necessary that a medical man should reside for a time beneath the same roof as his patient, and be with him night and day.

This patient was Lord Welbury, a self-made man so far as his immense wealth was concerned; but he came of an ancient and honourable race.

I accepted the munificent conditions offered, and within a couple of hours of my arrival in town was driven to Lord Welbury's house in Belgravia, and entered upon the duties of my post.

For some days and nights my responsibilities absorbed all my attention. The life of the sick man hung on a thread, my medical capacity was taxed to its utmost; I knew not, nor cared I, for the time being, what went on outside that chamber.

The crisis passed, my patient began rapidly to recover. The first day that he was able to sit up in his room he asked me a startling question. He said: "Doctor, am I sane?"

"Your mind has never been affected," I answered unhesitatingly. "Your lordship is as sane as I am."

"Good. Therefore a will made by me now could not be invalid?"

"Most certainly not on the ground of incompetency."

"Then my will must be made to-morrow or next day at latest.

This illness has warned me to delay no longer. My niece's child will be my heir."

His words set me musing and turning over in my mind how this could be.

"Your lordship is childless, then?" The remark slipped from me almost unawares; but they were fateful words, as the result proved. "I beg your pardon," I added, seeing surprise and some annoyance written on his face.

"Not at all," he answered courteously. "I suppose you are acquainted with my family affairs, for they are no secret. I *have* a son, though no communication has passed between us for nearly four years. He set me and my wishes at defiance by marrying beneath him, consequently will inherit little more than an empty title. I mean to leave my fortune to my niece's child. The boy was committed to my care when his parents went to India, two years ago. He is a fine little fellow, and it shows how close in attendance you have been on me if you did not even know he was in the house——"

"Was your son's name Charles—that of the girl he married Una?" I asked, scarcely heeding his last words. My heart was beating faster than it should, my voice in my earnestness less steady than it ought to be

"Yes. But why these questions?"

I knew he was well enough now to hear the truth, therefore I answered: "Because it is my belief your lordship's son is dead. I will relate to you a sad story; when I have finished you will be able to judge whether or not you are concerned in it." Then I told, as briefly as I could, the Croft House tragedy; and as I did so, read in the ever-increasing interest with which he listened to my tale that my suspicions were correct.

That the man I had to deal with was of a proud, egotistical, unsympathetic nature I was well aware; that the death of his only son would not vitally affect him I had rightly guessed; but I was scarcely prepared for the interest he displayed on learning of the existence of his grandchild. The better nature of the man seemed touched. I spoke of little Charles's beauty, his likeness to his father, even hinted at a resemblance to Lord Welbury himself. With the feverish impatience of an invalid he demanded that the boy should be sent for at once.

"He cannot come without his mother. The two lives are bound together as one."

"Then write to the mother and bid her bring him," was the imperious reply. And the speaker turned his face away as though to intimate no more was to be said. The affair was settled.

On quitting the room I encountered a nurse leading a smiling, rosy little urchin, clad in velvet and rich lace.

"Speak prettily to the kind doctor, Georgie," said the nurse. "This is the little heir, sir," she whispered to me.

Three days later Mrs. Wilton—I must still call her so—and her son arrived. I met them at the station and took them in one of his lordship's carriages to the house. The boy, exhausted apparently by the journey, was asleep when he entered it; he was still sleeping when his mother carried him across the threshold of Lord Welbury's door.

His lordship's reception of her was not ungracious. Could he fail to feel touched at sight of this gentle, beautiful young creature, who had loved his son so well! But it was evident he resented the fact that his grandson, whom he had specially desired to welcome, could not be prevailed upon to notice him, or enticed to leave his mother's arms.

"Excuse him. He is *so* tired," pleaded the young mother, reading the disappointment on her father-in-law's face.

"Well, well. Off to bed with him, then. Bring him to me bright and smiling in the morning."

Bright and smiling! Somehow the words struck me—even haunted me—they were so totally inapplicable to Charlie. I tried to remember if I had ever seen a smile upon that grave baby-face, but tried in vain.

When I entered Lord Welbury's room next day—my presence there at nights was now dispensed with—the old man, in dressing-gown and slippers, was reclining in an easy chair. In front of him stood Mrs. Wilton, with Charlie clinging to her long black draperies.

"Come here, Gray," exclaimed his lordship, irritably. "I cannot get my grandson to notice me. What is to be done?"

"Charlie is shy. He has been used to no one but me," murmured the mother, raising her eyes with an appealing look in them to mine.

"Madam, I fear you are spoiling him," said Lord Welbury sharply. "The other child took to me at once, but this——"

"Send for the other, sir," I suggested, and presently "the little heir," with whom I had previously made acquaintance, was brought in by his nurse. The latter sat down in a far corner with some knitting. The child—as apparently he had been accustomed to do—ran to the old man and scrambled at his knee. "I love 'ou, I love 'ou," he cried.

Lord Welbury's face was radiant.

"Now, Charlie, my man," said he, as the other child after his affectionate greeting scampered off to play beside his nurse.

Charlie was placed on his grandfather's knee.

"Say 'I love you,'" whispered Mrs. Wilton, as she tried to clasp her own child's arms about Lord Welbury's neck.

"Say I love 'ou," echoed the boy mechanically; then drooped his head and lay quite placidly as though he slept.

"Ha, ha, the young rascal! He's making himself at home at last," observed Lord Welbury, well pleased. "And now that I come

to see him more closely, he's not unlike what his father was at the same age, only quieter. Do you know he almost strikes me as being a little dull. Have you found him so, madam?"

"I have been too sad a companion for him, sir. I know—I feel it *now*," sighed the poor mother, her eyes wandering from her own boy to follow the antics of the other, who astride a stick, was careering merrily about the room.

"That can be soon remedied," said Lord Welbury, putting Charlie off his knee; "let the two youngsters romp together. I warrant they'll make friends if let alone."

And in order to try the experiment, we three sat apart and kept up some desultory talk. This lasted but a short time, however. It was broken in upon by a startled cry from the younger boy, Georgie, who, apparently terror stricken, rushed across the room.

"Naughty boy, naughty boy! Send him away. He's making faces at me," cried the spoilt child in an outburst of passion, pointing with outstretched finger at his little companion.

The nurse dropped her knitting, and rose instantly. "I have seen it from the first," she said, calmly confronting us. "The child is half an idiot, my lord."

All eyes were turned as poor Charlie, who stood among some broken toys, his features distorted into the ghastly semblance of a smile.

Mrs. Wilton, running to her boy, shielded him with her arms. "My darling, my darling! Has God no pity?" she cried, and bore him from the room. She had prayed day and night—this unhappy mother—to see either a smile on her baby's lips or a tear in his eye, and hitherto her prayer had been denied. It was granted now. The poor dulled senses of the child, roused into something like activity by the antics of his little lively playfellow, had caused the lips to smile. But what a smile!

Lord Welbury turned pale. A look of disgust, not unmixed with anger, settled on his face.

"There is no doubt the boy is imbecile," he said, as I was about to follow Mrs. Wilton from the room. "Dr. Gray, were you aware of this when you allowed him to be brought here?"

"I was not aware of it," I replied readily. For the sad foreboding that first assailed me on the lawn at Croft House had received no confirmation hitherto. "But even if the case is as we fear," I added earnestly, "it may be curable."

"Excuse me, doctor," he interrupted. "No man who has seen that child as we have seen him can have the slightest doubt but that he is an idiot for life."

"On the contrary, my lord, we must regard the matter from another point. Remember the shadow that rested on his mother before his birth. Where there is no hereditary taint——"

"What then? On the mere chance of the child being curable,

do you suppose I am going to leave my money to him? No!" he cried excitedly. "My own life is too precarious for me to delay longer the settling of my affairs. My niece's child is still my heir. I regard the other as *non est*. For heaven's sake don't let me have my feelings harrowed by the sight of that poor idiot any more. The mother shall have a handsome annuity. I pity her."

And that day Lord Welbury made his will, leaving his immense fortune as he had said.

Once more I returned to my country practice; Mrs. Wilton and Charlie to Croft House.

Never was grief grander in its simplicity, or more nobly borne than that of Mrs. Wilton. She still prayed—prayed with the faith which we are told will move mountains. Her eyes, when not raised to heaven, were bent on her child, ever seeking for the dawning of that intelligence which she believed must come in answer to her prayers. She tried to teach him his childish lessons; she read, she talked to him; even chanted in a low, sad voice the nursery rhymes that happy mothers sing.

At last, one day, exercising over herself a supreme control, she told her son the story of his father's death, told it in simple, child-like language, but with a pathos that might have moved a heart of stone.

The boy was standing at her knee, she holding his unresponsive hand. But, as she proceeded with her narration, he pressed gradually closer to her side. With a thrill of rapture she looked at the drooped eyelids, hoping, praying to see a tear glisten on the dark curled lashes. Trembling, she reached the climax of her sad tale, and bending over him:

"Charlie," she whispered, "Charlie, he was *dead!* you understand?"

Alas, she knew then, even ere she had done speaking that the boy was incapable of understanding her. His eyes were closed. He slept!

And he seemed for ever thus. Whether the beautiful but expressionless eyes were open or closed his mental faculties were in that dulled, dormant state, it might be said they slept.

"He is like that little statue of Jesus now," she once said to me, pointing to a marble figure of Christ, "but some day God will awaken his soul. Ah, doctor, shall I live to see that day?"

I scarcely thought she could, but did not tell her so.

From the day on which she related the story of her husband's death, she herself drooped visibly.

But grief kills very slowly. Five years passed by. Lord Welbury was dead. His wealth—with the exception of the annuity to his son's widow—was left to his niece's child; his title now by right became his grandson's.

The boy grew fast; he was eight years old, but his mind still slumbered. He knew the sound of his mother's voice, would come

to the side of her couch when called; would lie for hours folded in her arms, whispering back her loving words, repeating her gentle admonitions like an echo. The words apparently conveyed no meaning, but they touched some hidden chord.

Weaker and weaker grew Mrs. Wilton.

On one of my daily visits the sick nurse, who was in constant attendance now, whispered to me that the end was near. I was startled, shocked, to perceive *how* near!

"Doctor, dear friend," she gasped very faintly, as I pressed her poor transparent hand; but her whole attention was riveted on her son; she was gazing at him with eyes out of which the light of earth was fading fast. It was evident she desired to say something, but it was some time before the words would come. At last, gathering strength, she said in a low, penetrating voice that scarcely faltered: "I am going to leave you, Charlie. *Here* I could not help you, but when in heaven I see our dear Lord face to face—when on my knees before the great white throne——"

For an instant an expression of rapture irradiated her features; the next, with a slight sigh she sank back upon the pillow.

I touched Charlie on the shoulder. He dropped upon his knees and, unprompted, joined his trembling hands in prayer. His gaze was directed upward. His countenance assumed a look of intensity I had never seen on it before. Quite suddenly he rose, and flinging himself sobbing across the bed: "Oh, mother, mother! Do not leave me all alone," he cried.

"See! Your son is saved!" I whispered, bending over Mrs. Wilton. But I was speaking to the dead.

And yet, even as I looked upon the still white face, the lips seemed parting into a smile of the most holy, calm, ineffable content. Could it be as she herself had said? Was she already kneeling before the great white throne—had God listened to her prayer at last?

A few more words and this "o'er true tale" is ended.

From the moment of his mother's death, the mists that had obscured poor Charlie's mind dispersed.

I took him to live with me, and watched his young intelligence grow day by day to healthy vigour. Not even a shadowy semblance of a cloud rests now upon his mind. He has succeeded to his grandfather's wealth as well as to the title, for "the niece's child" is dead.

The present Lord Welbury ranks amongst England's noblest sons—he is one of the greatest philanthropists of the day.

E. M. Davy.

A DEFENCE.

A SINGER sings of Rights and Wrongs—
  Of world's ideals vast and bright,
And feels the impotence of songs
  To scourge the Wrong or help the Right,
And inly writhes to feel how vain
  Are songs as weapons for his fight;
And so he turns to love again
  And sings of love for heart's delight.

For heart's delight the singers bind
  The wreath of roses round the head,
And will not loóse it lest they find
  Time victor, and the roses dead.
Man can but sing of what he knows—
  "I saw the roses fresh and red!"
And so they sing the deathless rose
  With withered roses garlanded.

And some within their bosom hide
  Their rose of love still fresh and fair,
And walk in silence, satisfied
  To keep its folded fragrance rare.
And some—who bear a flag unfurled—
  Wreathe with their rose the flag they bear,
And sing their banner for the world,
  And, for their heart, the roses there.

Yet thus much choice in singing is:
  We sing the good—the true—the just,
Passionate duty turned to bliss,
  And honour growing out of trust;
Freedom we sing, and would not lose
  Her lightest footprint in life's dust.
We sing of her because we choose—
  We sing of love because we must!

E. NESBIT.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN

"CHARLEY, SUCH A CURIOUS THING HAPPENED THIS MORNING."

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXII.

PROWLING ABOUT.

SO the blow had fallen. What we were dreading had come to pass. Tom Heriot was back again.

I sat half-paralysed with terror. Leah stood before me on the hearthrug, pouring out her unwelcome disclosure with eager words now that her first emotion had subsided. She went on with her tale more coherently, but in undertones.

"After you had gone out this evening, Mr. Charles, I was in the kitchen, when one of those small handfuls of gravel I dread to hear rattled against the window. 'Nancy,' I groaned, my heart failing me. I could not go to the door, lest Watts should come up and see me, for I expected him back every minute; and, sure enough, just then I heard his ring. I gave him the *Law Times*, as you bade me, sir, telling him he was to take it round to Mr. Lake at once. When he was gone I ran up to the door and looked about, and saw Nancy in the shadow of the opposite house, where she mostly stands when waiting for me. I could not speak to her then, but told her I would try and come out presently. Her eldest boy, strolling away with others at play, had been run over by a cab somewhere in Lambeth; he was thought to be dying; and Nancy had come begging and praying me with tears to go with her to see him."

"And you went, I suppose, Leah. Go on."

"You know her dreadful life, Mr. Charles, its sorrows and its misery; how could I find it in my heart to deny her? When Watts came back from Mr. Lake's, I had my bonnet and shawl on. 'What, going out?' said he, in surprise, and rather crossly—for I had promised him a game at cribbage. 'Well,' I answered, 'I've just remembered that I have to fetch those curtains home to-night that went to be dyed; and I must hasten or the shop may be shut

up. I've put your supper ready in case they keep me waiting, but I daresay I shall not be long.'"

To attempt to hurry Leah through her stories when once she had entered upon them, was simply waste of words; so I listened with all the patience I had at command.

"The boy had been carried into a house down Lambeth way, and the doctor said he must not be moved; but the damage was not as bad, sir, as was at first thought, and I cheered Nancy up a bit by saying he would get all right and well. I think he will. Leaving her with the lad, I was coming back alone, when I missed my way. The streets are puzzling just there, and I am not familiar with them. I thought I'd ask at a book-stall, and went towards it. A sailor was standing outside, fingering the books and talking to somebody inside that I couldn't see. Mr. Charles, I had got within a yard of him, when I saw who it was—and the fright turned me sick and faint."

"You mean the sailor?"

"Yes, sir, the sailor. It was Captain Heriot, disguised. Oh, sir, what is to be done? The boy that I have often nursed upon my knee—what will become of him if he should be recognised?"

The very thought almost turned me sick and faint also, as Leah expressed it. How could Tom be so foolhardy? An escaped convict, openly walking about the streets of London!

"Did he see you, Leah?"

"No, sir; I stole away quickly; and the next turning brought me into the right road again."

"How did he look?"

"I saw no change in him, sir. He wore a round glazed hat, and rough blue clothes, with a large sailor collar, open at the throat. His face was not hidden at all. It used to be clean-shaved, you know, except the whiskers; but now the whiskers are gone, and he wears a beard. That's all the difference I could see in him."

Could this possibly be Tom? I scarcely thought so; scarcely thought that even he would be as reckless of consequences.

"Ah, Mr. Charles, do you suppose I could be mistaken in him?" cried Leah, in answer to my doubt. "Indeed, sir, it was Captain Heriot. He and the man inside—the master of the shop, I suppose—seemed talking as if they knew one another, so Mr. Tom may have been there before. Perhaps he is hiding in the neighbourhood."

"Hiding!" I repeated, in pain.

"Well, sir ——"

"Leah! have you gone up to bed?"

The words came floating up the staircase in Watts's deep voice. Leah hurried to the door.

"I came up to bring the master's candle," she called out, as she went down. "If you hadn't gone to sleep, you might have heard him ring for it."

All night I lay awake, tormented on the score of Tom Heriot. Now looking at the worst side of things, now trying to see them at their best, the hours dragged along, one after the other, until daybreak. In spite of Leah's statement and her own certainty in the matter, my mind refused to believe that the sailor she had seen could be Tom. Tom was inconceivably daring; but not daring enough for this. He would have put on a more complete disguise. At least, I thought so.

But if indeed it was Tom—why, then there was no hope. He would inevitably be recaptured. And this meant I knew not what of heavier punishment for himself; and for the rest of us further exposure, reflected disgrace and mental pain.

Resolving to go myself at night and reconnoitre, I turned to my day's work. In the course of the morning a somewhat curious thing happened. The old saying says that "In looking for one thing you find another," and it was exemplified in the present instance. I was searching Mr. Brightman's small desk for a paper that I thought might be there, and, as I suppose, accidentally touched a spring, for the lower part of the desk suddenly loosened, and I found it had a false bottom to it. Lifting the upper portion, I found several small deeds of importance, letters and other papers; and lying on the top of all was a small packet, inscribed "Lady Clavering," in Mr. Brightman's writing.

No doubt the letters she was uneasy about, and which I had hitherto failed to find. But now, what was I to do? Give them back to her? Well no, I thought not. At any rate, not until I had glanced over them. Their being in this secret division proved the importance attaching to them.

Untying the narrow pink ribbon that held them together, there fell out a note of Sir Ralph Clavering's, addressed to Mr. Brightman. It was dated just before his death, and ran as follows:

"I send you the letters I told you I had discovered. Read them, and keep them safely. Should trouble arise with her after my death, confront her with them. Use your own discretion about showing them or not to my nephew Edmund. But should she acquiesce in the just will I have made, and when all things are settled on a sure foundation, then destroy the letters, unseen by any eye save your own: I do not wish to expose her needlessly. R. C."

Lady Clavering had not acquiesced in the will, and she was still going on with her threatened and most foolish action. I examined the letters. Some were written *to* her; not by her husband, though; some were written *by* her: and, take them for all in all, they were about as damaging a series as any it was ever my fate to see.

"The senseless things these women are!" thought I. "How on earth came she to preserve such letters as these?"

I sent a messenger for Sir Edmund Clavering. Mr. Brightman was to use his own discretion: I hardly thought any was left to me.

It was more Sir Edmund's place to see them than mine. He came at once.

"By George!" he exclaimed, when he had read two or three of them, his handsome face flushing, his brow knit in condemnation. "What a despicable woman! We have the cause in our own hands now."

"Yes; she cannot attempt to carry it further."

We consulted a little as to the best means of making the truth known to Lady Clavering: an unthankful office that would fall to me: and Sir Edmund rose to leave.

"Keep the letters safely," he said: almost in the very words Sir Ralph had written. "Do not bring them within a mile of her hands: copies, if she pleases, as many as she likes. And when things are upon a safe footing, as my uncle says, and there's no longer anything to fear from her, then they can be destroyed."

"Yes. Of course, Sir Edmund," I continued, in some hesitation, "she must be spared to the world. This discovery must be held sacred between us ——"

"Do you mean that as a caution?" he interrupted in surprise. "Why, Strange, what do you take me for?"

He clasped my hand with a half laugh, and went out. Yes, Lady Clavering had contrived to damage herself, but it would never transpire to her friends or her enemies.

Leah had noticed the name of the street containing the book-stall, and when night came I put on a discarded old great coat and slouching hat, and set out for it. It was soon found: a narrow, well-frequented street, leading out of the main thoroughfare, full of poor shops, patronised by still poorer customers.

The book-stall was on the right, about half-way down the street. Numbers of old books lay upon a board outside, lighted by a flaring, smoking tin lamp. Inside the shop they seemed chiefly to deal in tobacco and snuff. Every now and then the master of the shop—whose name, according to the announcement above the shop, must be Caleb Lee—came to the door to look about him, or to answer the questions of some outside customer touching the books. But as yet I saw no sign of Tom Heriot.

Opposite the shop, on the other side the way, was a dark entry; into that entry I ensconced myself to watch.

Tired of this at last, I marched to the end of the street, crossed over, strolled back on the other side the way, and halted at the book-stall. There I began to turn the books about: anything to while away the time.

"Looking for any book in particular, sir?"

I turned sharply at the question, which came from the man, Lee. The voice sounded familiar to my ear. Where had I heard it?

"You have not an old copy of the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' I suppose?"—the work flashing into my mind by chance.

"No, sir. I had one, but it was bought last week. There's 'Fatherless Fanny,' sir; that's a very nice book; it was thought a deal of some years ago. And there's the 'Water Witch,' by Cooper. That's good, too."

I remembered the voice now. It was that of Leah's mysterious visitor of the night before, who had been curiously inquisitive about me. Recognition came upon me with a shock, and opened up a new fear.

Taking the "Water Witch"—for which I paid fourpence—I walked on again. Could it be possible that *Tom Heriot* was passing himself off for me? Why, this would be the veriest folly of all. But no; that was altogether impossible.

Anxious and uneasy I turned about again and again. The matter ought to be set at rest, yet I knew not how to do it.

I entered the shop, which contained two small counters: the one covered with papers, the other with smoking gear. Lee stood behind the former, serving a customer, who was inquiring for last week's number of the "Fireside Friend." Behind the other counter sat a young girl, pretty and modest. I turned to her.

"Will you give me a packet of bird's-eye?"

"Yes, sir," she answered in pleasant tones; and, opening a drawer, handed me the tobacco, ready wrapped up. It would do for Watts. Bird's-eye, I knew, was his favourite mixture.

"Thank you, sir," she said, returning me the change out of a florin. "Anything else, sir?"

"Yes; a box of wax matches."

But the matches were not to be found, and the girl appealed to her father.

"Wax matches," returned the man from across the shop. "Why they are on the shelf behind you, Betsy."

The matches were found, the girl took the money for them, and thanked me again. All very properly and modestly. The girl was evidently as modest and well-behaved as a girl could be.

So that was Betsy! But who was it that was courting her in my name? One of my office clerks—or Captain Thomas Heriot?

Captain Thomas Heriot did not make his appearance, and I began to hope that Leah had been mistaken. It grew late. I was heartily tired, and turned to make my way home.

Why I should have looked round I cannot tell, but I did look round just as I reached the end of the street. Looming slowly up in the distance was a sailor, with a sailor's swaying walk, and he turned into the shop.

I turned back also, all my pulses quickened. I did not follow him in, for we might have betrayed ourselves. I stood outside, occupied with the old books again, and pulled the collar of my coat well up, and my hat well down. Not here must there be any mutual recognition.

How long did he mean to stay there? For ever? He and Lee seemed to be at the back of the shop, talking together. I could not hear the voices sufficiently to judge whether one of them was that of Tom Heriot.

He was coming now! Out he came, puffing at a fresh-lighted pipe, his glazed hat at the back of his head, his face lifted to the world.

"Tell you we shall, master. Fine to-morrow? not a bit of it. Rain as sure as a gun. This dampness in the air is a safe sign on't. Let a sailor alone for knowing the weather."

"At sea, maybe," retorted Caleb Lee. "But I never yet knew a sailor who wasn't wrong about the weather on shore. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night to you, master," responded the sailor.

He lounged slowly away. It was not Tom Heriot. About his build and his fair complexion, but shorter than Tom. A real, genuine jack tar, this, unmistakably. Was he the man Leah had seen? This one wore no beard, but bushy, drooping whiskers.

"Looking for another book, sir?"

In momentary confusion, I caught up the book nearest at hand. It proved to be "Fatherless Fanny," and I said I'd take it. While searching for the money, I remarked that the sailor, just gone away, had said we should have rain to-morrow.

"I don't see that he is obliged to be right, though he was so positive over it," returned the man. "I hate a rainy day: spoils our custom. Thankye, sir. Sixpence this time. That's right."

"Do many sailors frequent this neighbourhood?"

"Not many; we've a sprinkling of 'em sometimes. They come over here from the Kent Road way."

Well, and what else could I ask? Nothing. And just then a voice came from the shop.

"Father," called out Miss Betsy, "is it not time to shut up?"

"What do you ask? Getting a little deaf, sir, in my old age. Coming, Betsy."

He turned into the shop, and I walked away for the night: hoping, ah! how earnestly, that Leah had been mistaken.

"Mr. Strange, my lord."

It was the following evening. Restlessly anxious about Tom Heriot, I betook myself to Gloucester Place as soon as dinner was over, to ask Major Carlen whether he had learnt anything farther. The disreputable old man was in some way intimate with one or two members of the Government. To my surprise, Sanders, Lord Level's servant, opened the door to me, and showed me to the dining-room. Lord Level sat there alone over his after-dinner claret.

"You look as if you hardly believed your eyes, Charles," he laughed as he shook hands. "Sit down. Glasses, Sanders."

"And surprised I may well look to see you here, when I thought you were in Paris," was my answer.

"We came over to-day; got here an hour ago. Blanche was very ill in crossing and has gone to bed."

"Where is Major Carlen?"

"Oh, he is off to Jersey to see his sister, Mrs. Guy. At least, that is what he said; but he is not famous for veracity, you know, and it is just as likely that he may be catching the mail train at London Bridge en route for Homburg, as the Southampton train from Waterloo. Had you been half-an-hour earlier, you might have had the pleasure of assisting at his departure. I have taken this house for a month and paid him in advance," added Lord Level, as much as to say that the Major was not altogether out of funds.

A short silence ensued. The thoughts of both of us were no doubt busy. Level, his head bent, was slowly turning his wine-glass round by its stem.

"Charles," he suddenly said, in a half-whisper, "what of Tom Heriot?"

I hardly knew how to take the question. "I know nothing more of him," was my answer.

"Is he in London, think you? Have you heard news of him, in any way?"

Now I could not say that I had heard news: for Leah's information was not news, if (as I hoped) she was mistaken. And I judged it better not to speak of it to Lord Level until the question was set at rest. Why torment him needlessly?

"I wrote you word what Major Carlen said: that Tom was one of those who escaped. The ship was wrecked upon an uninhabited island, believed to be that of Tristan d'Acunha. After a few days some of the convicts contrived to steal a boat and make good their escape. Of course they were in hopes of being picked up by some homeward-bound ship; and may already have reached England."

"Look here," said Lord Level, after a pause: "that island lies, no doubt, in the track of ships bound to the Colonies, but not in the track of those homeward-bound. So the probability is, that if the convicts were sighted and picked up, they would be carried further from England, not brought back to it."

I confess that this view had not occurred to me; in fact, I knew very little about navigation, or the courses taken by ships. It served to strengthen my impression that Leah had been in error.

"Are you sure of that?" I asked him.

"Sure of what?" returned Lord Level.

"That the island would be out of the track of homeward-bound vessels."

"Quite sure. Homeward-bound vessels come round Cape Horn. Those bound for the Colonies go by way of the Cape of Good Hope."

"My visit here to-night was to ask Major Carlen whether he had heard any further particulars."

"I think he heard a few more to-day," said Lord Level. "The *Vengeance* was wrecked, it seems, on this island. It is often sighted by ships going to the Colonies, and the captain was in hopes that his signals from the island would be seen, and some ship would bear down to them. In vain. After the convicts—five of them, I believe—had made their escape, he determined to send off the long-boat, in charge of the chief officer, to the nearest Australian coast, for assistance. On the 10th of December the boat set sail, and on Christmas Day was picked up by the *Vernon*, which reached Melbourne the last day of the year."

"But how do you know all these details?" I interrupted in surprise.

"They have been furnished to the government, and Carlen was informed of them this morning," replied Lord Level. "On the following day, the 1st of January, the ship *Lightning* sailed from Melbourne for England; she was furnished with a full account of the wreck of the *Vengeance* and what succeeded to it. The *Lightning* made a good passage home, and on her arrival, laid her reports before the government. That's how it is."

"And what of the escaped convicts?"

"Nothing is known of them. The probability is that they were picked up by an outward-bound ship and landed in one of the Colonies. If not, they must have perished at sea."

"And if they were so picked up and landed, I suppose they would have reached England by this time?"

"Certainly—seeing that the *Lightning* has arrived. And the convicts had some days' start of the long-boat. I hope Tom Heriot will not make his way here!" fervently spoke Lord Level. "The consequences would three parts kill my wife. No chance of keeping it from her in such a hullabaloo as would attend his recapture."

"I cannot think how you have managed to keep it from her as it is."

"Well, I have been watchful and cautious—and we have not mixed much with the gossiping English. What! are you going, Charles?"

"Yes, I have an engagement," I answered, as we both rose. "Good-night. Give my love to Blanche. Tell her that Charley will see her to-morrow if he can squeeze out a minute's leisure for it."

Taking up the old coat I had left in the passage, I went out with it on my arm, hailed a cab that was crossing Portman Square, and was driven to Lambeth. There I recommenced my watch upon the book-stall and the street containing it, not, however, disclosing myself to Lee to-night. But nothing was to be seen of Tom Heriot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. BRIGHTMAN.

"SUR this coms hoppin youle excuse blundurs bein no skollerd sur missis is worse and if youle com ive got som things to tell you I darnt keep um any longer your unbil servint emma hatch but doant say to peri as i sent."

This remarkable missive was delivered to me by the late afternoon post. The schoolmaster must have been abroad when Hatch received her education.

I had intended to spend the evening with Blanche. It was the day subsequent to her arrival from France with Lord Level, and I had not yet seen her. But this appeared to be something like an imperative summons, and I resolved to attend to it.

"The more haste, the less speed." The proverb exemplifies itself very frequently in real life. Ordering my dinner to be served half an hour earlier than usual, I had no sooner eaten it than a gentleman called and detained me. It was close upon eight o'clock when I reached Clapham.

Perry, the butler, received me as usual. "Oh, sir, such a house of sickness as it is!" he exclaimed, leading the way to the drawing-room. "My mistress is in bed with brain-fever. They were afraid of it yesterday, but it has quite shown itself to-day. And Miss Annabel is still at Hastings. I say she ought to be sent for; Hatch says not, and tells me to mind my own business: but ——"

Hatch herself interrupted the sentence. She came into the room and ordered Perry out of it. The servants, even Perry, had grown into the habit of obeying her. Closing the door, she advanced to me as I stood warming my hands at the fire, for it was a sharp night.

"Mr. Strange, sir," she began in a low tone, "did you get that epistle from me?"

I nodded.

"You've not been down here much lately, sir. Last night I thought you might come, the night afore I thought it. The last time you did come you never stepped inside the door."

"Where is the use of coming, Hatch, when I am always told that Mrs. Brightman cannot see me—and that Miss Annabel remains at Hastings?"

"And a good thing that she do remain there," returned Hatch. "Perry, the gaby, says, 'Send for Miss Annabel: why don't you write for Miss Annabel?' But that his brains is no bigger than one o' them she-goose's on Newland Common, he'd have found out why afore now. Sir," continued Hatch, changing her tone, "I want to know what I be to do. I'm not a person of edication or book-learning, but my wits is alive, and they serves me instead. For this

two or three days past, sir, I've been thinking that I ought to tell out to somebody responsible what it is that's the matter with my missis, and I know of nobody nearer the family than you, sir. There's her brother, in course, at the Hall, Captain Chantry, but my missis has held herself aloof from him and Lady Grace, and I know she'd be in a fine way if I spoke to him. Three or four days ago I said to myself, 'The first time I see Mr. Strange, I'll tell him the truth.' Last night she was worse than she has been at all, quite raving; I got frightened, which is a complaint I'm not given to, and resolved not to let another day pass, and then, whether she lived or died, the responsibility would not lie upon my back."

Straightening myself, I stood gazing at Hatch. She had spoken rapidly. If I had caught all the words, I did not catch their meaning.

"Yes?" I said, mechanically.

"And so, with morning light, sir, I wrote you that epistle."

"Yes, yes; never mind all that. What about Mrs. Brightman?"

Hatch dropped her voice to a lower and more mysterious whisper. "Sir, my missis gives way, she do."

"Gives way," I repeated, gazing at Hatch, and still unable to see any meaning in the words. "What do you say she does?"

Hatch took a step forward, which brought her on the hearthrug, close to me. "Yes, sir; missis gives way."

"Gives way to what?" I reiterated. "To her superstitious fancies?"

"No, sir, to stimilinks."

"To ——" The meaning, in spite of Hatch's obscure English, dawned upon me now. A cold shiver ran through me. Annabel's mother! and honoured Henry Brightman's wife!

"She takes stimulants!" I gasped.

"Yes, sir; stimilinks," proceeded Hatch. "A'most any sort that comes anigh her. She likes wine and brandy best; but failing them, she'll drink others."

Question upon question rose to my mind. Had it been known to Mr. Brightman? Had it been a prolonged habit? Was it deeply indulged in? But Annabel was her child, and my lips refused to utter them.

"It has been the very plague of my life and my master's to keep it private these many months past," continued Hatch. "'Hatch does this in the house, and Hatch does the other,' the servants cry. Yes; but my master knew why I set up my authority; and missis knew it too. It was to screen her."

"How could she have fallen into the habit?"

"It has grown upon her by degrees, sir. A little at first, and a little, and then a little more. As long as master was here, she was kept tolerably in check, but since his death there has been nobody to restrain her, except me. Whole days she has been in her room,

shutting out Miss Annabel, under the excuse of headaches or lowness, drinking all the time; and me there to keep the door. I'm sure the black stories I have gone and invented, to pacify Miss Annabel and put her off the right scent, would drive a parson to his prayers."

"Then Miss Annabel does not know it?"

"She do now," returned Hatch. "The first night there was that disturbance in the house about missis seeing the ghost, her room was thrown open in the fright, and all the house got in. I turned the servants out: I dared not turn out Miss Annabel, and she couldn't fail to see that her mother was the worse for drink. So then I told her some, and Mr. Close told her more next morning."

Annabel's strange grief, so mysterious to me, was accounted for now. Hatch continued.

"You see now, sir, why Miss Annabel has been kept so much at Hastings. Master would never have her at home for long together afeared her mother might betray herself. He wanted to keep the child in ignorance of it, as long as it was possible. Miss Brightman knew it. She found it out the last time she was visiting here; and she begged my missis, on her bended knees, to be true to herself, and leave it off. Missis promised—and such a bout of crying they two had together afore Miss Lucy went away! For a time she did get better; but it all came back again. And then came master's death—and the shock and grief of that has made her give way more than she ever did. And there it is, sir. The secret's got too weighty for me; I couldn't keep it to myself any longer."

"Perry says Mrs. Brightman is now lying ill with brain fever."

"We call it brain fever to the servants, me and Mr. Close; it's near enough for them," was Hatch's cool reply. "The curious thing is that Perry don't seem to suspect; he sees more of his missis than the rest do, and many a time must have noticed her shaking. Last night her fit of shaking was dreadful—and her fever too, for the matter of that. She is as close as she well can be upon that disorder that comes of drink. If it goes on to a climax, nothing can save the disgrace from coming out downstairs."

Nothing could or would save it, in my opinion, downstairs or up, indoors or out. What a calamity!

"But she is a trifle better to-night," continued Hatch. "The medicines have taken effect at last and put her into a deep sleep, or else I couldn't be talking here."

"Did you invent the episode of Mr. Brightman's ghost, Hatch, by way of accounting for Mrs. Brightman's state to the servants?" I inquired.

"*I* invent it!" returned Hatch. "I didn't invent it. My missis did see it. Not, I take it, that there was any ghost to see, in one sense, but when these poor creatures is in the shakes, they fancy they see all kinds of things—monkeys and demons, and such like. I can't

believe it was master. I don't see why he should come back, being a good man; and good men that die in peace be pretty sure to rest in their graves. Still, I'd not be too sure. It may be that he comes back, as my missis fancies, to silently reproach her. It's odd that she always sees him in the same place, and in his shroud. Several times she has seen him now, and her description of how he looks never varies. Nothing will ever persuade her, sick or well, that it is fancy."

"You have seen him also, I hear?"

"Not I," said Hatch. "I have upheld what my missis says. For which was best, Mr. Strange, sir—to let the servants think she is shaking and raving from fear of a ghost, or to let 'em get to suspect her the worse for drink?"

Hatch's policy had no doubt been wise in this. I told her so.

"I have seen the shakes before to-day; was used to 'em when a child, as may be said," resumed Hatch. "I had a step-uncle, sir, mother's half-brother, who lived next door to us; he was give to drink, and he had 'em now and then. Beer were his chief weakness; wine is missis's. If that step-uncle of mine had been put to stand head downwards in a beer barrel, Mr. Charles, he'd not have thought he had enough. He'd be always seeing things, he would; blue and red and green imps that crawled up his bed-posts, and horrid little black devils. He used to start out of doors and run away for fear of 'em. Once he ran out stark naked, all but his shoes; he tore past the cottages all down the village, and flung himself into the pond opposite the stocks. All the women watching him from their doors and windows, followed after him. The men thought it were at least a mad dog broke loose, seeing the women in pursuit like that; whereas it were nothing but my step-uncle in one of his bouts—stripped. Mrs. Brightman would never do such a thing as that, being a lady; but they be all pretty much alike for sense when the fit is on 'em."

"And Mr. Brightman knew of this, you say? Knew that she was given to—to like stimulants?"

"He couldn't be off knowing of it, sir, habiting, as he did, the same rooms: and it has just bittered his life out. She has never had a downright bad attack, like this one, therefore we could hide it from the servants and from Miss Annabel, but it couldn't be hided from him. He first spoke to me about it six or seven months ago, when he was having an iron bedstead put up in the little room close to hers; until then he had made believe to me not to see it. Sometimes I know he talked to her, all lovingly and persuasively, and I would see her with red eyes afterwards. I once heard her say, 'I will try, Henry, indeed, I will;' and I do believe she did. But she got worse, and then master spoke to Mr. Close."

"Has it been long growing upon her?" I asked, in a low voice.

"Sir," returned Hatch, looking at me with her powerful eyes, "it

has been growing for years and years. I think it came on, first, from idleness ——"

"From idleness!"

"I mean what I say, sir. She married master for a home, as it were, and she didn't care for him. She cared for somebody else—but things wouldn't work convenient, and they had to part. Miss Emma Chantry was high-born and beautiful, but she had no money, and the gentleman had no money either, so it would not do. It was all over and done with long before she knew Mr. Brightman. Well, sir, she married and come home here. But she never liked the place; commercial, she said, these neighbourhoods was, round London, and the people were beneath her. So she wouldn't visit, and she wouldn't sew nor read; she'd just sit all day long with her hands afore her, a doing of nothing. I saw that as soon as I took service here. 'Wait,' said I to myself, 'till the baby comes.' Well, it came, sweet little Miss Annabel, but it didn't make a pin's difference: missis got a maid for it, and then a governess, and turned her over to them. No more babies followed; pity but what a score of 'em had; they might have roused her from her apathy."

"But surely she did not give way, as you call it, then?"

"No, not then. She was just ate up with weariness; she found no pleasure in life, and she did no work in it; when morning broke she'd wish the day was over; and when night came she'd wish it was morning; and so the years went by. Then she got to say—it come on quite imperceptible—'Hatch, get me a glass of wine; I'm so low and exhausted.' And I used to get her one, thinking nothing. She took it then, just because she wanted something to rouse her, and didn't know what. That was the beginning of it, Mr. Charles."

"A very unfortunate beginning."

"But," continued Hatch, "after a while, she got to like the wine, and in course o' time, she couldn't do without it; a glass now and a glass then between her meals, besides what she took with them, and it was a great deal; pretty nigh a bottle a-day I fancy, altogether. Master couldn't make out how it was his wine went, and he spoke sharp to Perry; and when missis found that, she took to have some in on her own account, unbeknowing to him. Then it grew to brandy. Upon the slightest excuse, just a stitch in her side, or her finger aching, she would say 'Hatch, I must have half a glass of hot brandy-and-water.' Folks don't stop at the first liquor, sir, when it gets to that pitch; my step-uncle would have swallowed vitrol sooner than have kept to beer."

"Hatch, this is a painful tale."

"And I've not finished of it," was Hatch's response. "Missis had an illness a year or eighteen months back; I daresay you remember it, sir. Weak enough she was when she began to get about; some people thought she wouldn't live. 'She must take stimilinks to

strengthen her,' says Close. 'She don't want stimilinks' says I; 'she'll get better without 'em;' for she was a taking of 'em then in secret, though he didn't know it. 'Mrs. Brightman must take stimilinks,' says he to master. 'Whatever you thinks necessary,' returns master—though if he hadn't begun to suspect then, it's odd to me. And my missis was not backward to take Close's stimilinks, and she took her own as well; and that I look upon as the true foundation of it all; it might never have grown into a habit but for that; and since then matters have been going from bad to worse. It's a dangerous plan for doctors to order stimilinks to weak people," added Hatch reflectively; "evil comes of it sometimes."

I had heard that opinion before; more than once. I had heard Mr. Brightman express it to a client, who was recovering from an illness. Was he thinking of his wife?

"And for the last six months or so my missis has been getting almost beyond control," resumed Hatch; "one could hardly keep her within bounds. Me and master tried everything. We got Miss Annabel out of the way, not letting her come home but for two or three days at a time, and them days—my patience! if I hadn't to watch missis like a cat! She didn't wish to exceed in the daytime when Miss Annabel was here, though she would at night; but you know, sir, these poor creatures can't keep their resolves; and if she once got a glass early, then all her prudence went to the winds. I did my best; master did his best; and she'd listen, and be reasonable, and say she'd touch nothing. But upon the least temptation she'd give way. My belief is, she couldn't help it; when it comes to this stage it's just a disease. A disease, Mr. Charles, like the measles or the yellow jaundice, and they can't put it from 'em if they would."

True.

"On the Thursday night, it was the Thursday before the master died there was a quarrel," Hatch went on. "Mrs. Brightman was not fit to appear at the dinner-table, and her dinner was sent up to her room, and master came upstairs afterwards, and they had words. Master said he should send Miss Annabel to Hastings in the morning and keep her there, for it would be impossible to hide matters from her longer if she stayed at home. Mrs. Brightman, who was not very bad, resented that, and called him harsh names: generally speaking she was as humble as could be, knowing herself in the wrong and feeling ashamed of it. They parted in anger. Master was as good as his word; he sent Miss Annabel with Sarah down to Hastings on the Friday morning to Miss Brightman. In the evening when he came home to dinner, missis was again the worse for drink. But on the Saturday morning she was up betimes, afore the household even, and had ordered the carriage, and went whirling off with me to the station to take the first train for Hastings. 'I shall return on Monday and bring back Annabel,' she said to master, when she was stepping into the carriage at the door, and he ran out to ask

where she was going, for he had not seen nor heard nothing about it. 'Very well,' said he in a whisper; 'only come back as you ought to come.' Mr. Charles, I think those were the only words that passed between them after the quarrel."

"You mean the quarrel on the Thursday night?"

"Yes, sir; there was no other quarrel. We went to the Queen's Hotel. And on the Sunday, if you remember, you came down to tell us of the master's sudden death. Mrs. Brightman was ill that morning, really ill, I mean, with one of her dreadful headaches—which she did have at times, and when she didn't they was uncommon convenient things for me to fall back upon if I needed an excuse for her. She had meant to go to church but was not able. She had had too much on the Saturday night, though she was always more prudent out than at home, and was worried in mind besides. But, to be sure, how she did take on about master's death when alone with me. They had parted bad friends: leastways had not made it up after the quarrel; she knew how aggravating she had been to him in it, and a notion got hold of her that he might have poisoned himself. When she learnt the rights of it, that he had died peaceful and natural, she didn't get much happier. She was perpetually saying to me, as the days went on, that her conduct had made him miserable. She drank then, to drown care; she fancied she saw all sorts of things, and when it came to master's ghost ——"

"She could not have been sober when she fancied that."

"Nor was she," returned Hatch. "Half-and-half like; had enough to betray herself to Miss Annabel. 'Now don't you go and contradict about the ghost,' I says to her, poor child; 'better let the kitchen think it's a ghost than brandy-and-water.' Frightful vexed and ashamed missis was when she grew sober, to find that Miss Annabel knew the truth. She told her she must go to her aunt at Hastings for a time; Mr. Close, he said the same. Miss Annabel would not go; she said it was not right that she should leave her mother, and there was a scene; miss sobbing and crying, mistress angry and commanding; but it ended in her going. 'I don't want no spies upon me,' says missis to me, 'and she shall stop at Hastings for good.' Since then she has been giving way unbearable, and the end of it is, she has got the shakes."

What a life! What a life it had been for Mr. Brightman! Lennard had thought of late that he appeared as a man who bore about him some hidden grief! Once, when he had seemed low-spirited I asked whether anything was amiss. "We all have our trials, Charles; some more, some less," was the answer, in tones that rather shut me up.

Hatch would fain have talked until now: if wine was her mistress's weakness, talking was hers; but she was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Close, and had to attend him upstairs. On his return he came into the drawing-room.

"This is a disagreeable business, Mr. Strange. Hatch tells me she has informed you of the true nature of the case."

A disagreeable business! The light words, the matter-of-fact tone seemed as a mockery. The business nearly overwhelmed *me*.

"When you met me the other night, at the gate, and spoke of Mrs. Brightman's illness, I was uncertain how to answer you," continued Mr. Close. "I thought it probable you might be behind the curtain, connected as you are with the family, but I was not sure."

"I never had the faintest suspicion of such a thing, until Hatch's communication to me to night. She says her young mistress, even, did not know of it."

"No; they have contrived to keep it from Annabel."

"Will Mrs. Brightman recover?"

"From this illness? oh, dear, yes. She is already in a fair way for it, having dropped into the needed sleep: which is all we want. If you mean will she recover from the habit—why, I cannot answer you. It has obtained a safe hold upon her."

"What is to be done?"

"What can be done?" returned the surgeon. "Mrs. Brightman is her own mistress, subject to no control, and has a good income at command. She may go on drinking to the end."

Go on drinking to the end! What a fearful thought! what a fearful life! Could *nothing* be done to prevent it; to recall her to herself; to her responsibility for this world and the next?

"I have seen much of these cases," continued Mr. Close; "few medical men more. Before I came into this practice I was assistant-surgeon to one of the debtors' prisons up in town: no school equal to that in all Europe for initiating a man into the mysteries of the disorder."

"Ay, so I believe. But can Mrs. Brightman's case be like those cases?"

"Why should it differ from them? The same habits have induced it. Of course she is not yet as bad as some of them are, but unless she pulls up she will become so. Her great chance, her one chance, I may say, would be to place herself under some proper control. But this would require firm resolution and self-denial. To begin with, she would have to leave her home."

"This cannot be a desirable home for Annabel."

"No. Were she my child, she should not return to it."

"What is to be done when she recovers from this attack?"

"In what way?"

In what way, truly! My brain was at work over the difficulties of the future. Was Mrs. Brightman to live on in this, her home, amidst her household of curious servants, amidst the prying neighbours, all of whom would revel in a tale of scandal?

"When she is sufficiently well she should have change of air,"

proceeded the doctor, "and get her nerves braced up. Otherwise she may be seeing that ghost for six months to come. A strange fancy, that, for her to take up—and yet, perhaps, not so very strange, taking all things into consideration. She is full of remorse, thinking she might have done her duty better by her husband, made him less unhappy, and all that. Mrs. Brightman is a gentlewoman of proud, elevated instincts: she would be only too thankful to leave off this demoralising habit; in a way, I believe she strives to do it, but it is stronger than she is."

"It has become worse, Hatch says, since Mr. Brightman died."

"Undoubtedly," concluded Mr. Close. "She has taken it to drown care."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY LORD AND MY LADY.

THE breakfast-table was laid in Gloucester Place, waiting for Lord and Lady Level. It was the day following the one recorded of in the last chapter. A clear, bright morning, the sun shining hotly.

Blanche came in, wearing a dainty white dress. Her face, though thin, was fair and lovely as ever, her eyes were as blue and brilliant. Ringing for the coffee to be brought in, she began turning over the letters on the table: one for herself, which she saw was from Mrs. Guy; three for her husband. Of these, one bore the Paris postmark.

"Here is a letter from Paris, Archibald," she said to him as he entered. "I think from Madame Sauvage; it is like her writing. I hope it is to say that she has sent off the box."

"That you may regain possession of your finery," rejoined Lord Level, with a light, pleasant laugh. "Eh, Blanche?"

"Well, my new lace mantle is in it. So stupid of Timms to have made the mistake."

"So it was. I daresay the box is on its road by this time."

Blanche began to pour out the coffee. Lord Level had gone to the window and was looking up and down the street. As he took his seat to begin his breakfast, he pushed the letters away idly without opening them, and remarked upon the fineness of the morning.

They were fairly good friends, these two; always courteous, save when Blanche was seized with a fit of jealousy, persuading herself, rightly or wrongly, that she had cause for it. Then she would be cross, bitter, snappish. Once in a way Lord Level retorted in kind; though on the whole, he was patient and gentle with her. In the midst of it all she loved him passionately at heart, and sometimes let him know it.

"As it is so fine a day, Archibald, you might take me to Kensington, to call on Mrs. Page Reid, this afternoon. She sent us her address, you know."

"I would rather not, Blanche, unless you very particularly wish it.

I don't care to keep up Mrs. Page Reid's acquaintance. She's good for nothing but to talk scandal."

"I do not much care for her either," acknowledged Blanche. "We are not in the least obliged to renew her acquaintance."

"I will take you somewhere else instead," said he, pleased at her acquiescence. "We will go out after luncheon and make an afternoon of it—like Darby and Joan."

Presently, when breakfast was nearly over, Blanche opened her letter from Mrs. Guy; reading out scraps of it to her husband. It told of Major Carlen's arrival—so that he really had gone to Jersey. Then she took up the *Times*. An unusual thing for her to do. She did not care for newspapers, and Lord Level did not have them sent to him when in Paris: he saw the English journals at the club. No doubt he had his reasons for so doing.

Meanwhile he was opening his own letters. The one from Paris came last. Had his wife been looking at him she might have seen a sudden change pass over his face as he read it, as though startled by some doubt or perplexity.

"Archibald, what can this mean?" exclaimed Blanche in breathless tones. "Listen: 'The names of the five convicts said to have escaped from the ship *Vengeance* after her wreck on the island, supposed to be that of Tristan d'Acunha, are the following: George Ford, Walter Green, John Andison, Nathaniel Markham and Thomas Heriot.' That is Tom's name."

Cramming all his letters into his breast pocket with a hurried movement, Lord Level quietly took the paper from his wife's hands. This was the very contretemps he had so long striven to guard against.

"My dear Blanche, do you suppose there is only one Thomas Heriot in the world?" cried he, carelessly. "What does it say? 'Ship *Vengeance?*' 'Escape of convicts?' Oh, it is something that has happened over at Botany Bay."

"Well, the name startled me, at the moment. I'm sure Tom might as well be a convict as anything else for all the news he sends us of himself."

"He was always careless, you know; and detested letter-writing."

Carrying away the paper, Lord Level left the room and went to the one behind it, of which he made a sort of study. There he sat down, spread the letter from Paris before him on the table, and re-perused it.

"Confound the woman!" remarked his lordship. "I shall have to go down there now!"

The breakfast removed, Blanche began at once to write to Mrs. Guy, whose letter required an answer. That over, she put on her bonnet to call on Mrs. Arnold Ravensworth in Langham Place. She had called on the previous day, but found Mr. and Mrs. Ravensworth out of town: they were expected home that evening. So now Blanche went again.

Yes, they had arrived; and had brought with them Blanche's old friend, Cecilia Ravensworth, from White Littleham Rectory.

How happy they were together, these two! It seemed an age since they had parted, and yet it was not in reality so very long ago. Lady Level remained the best part of the morning, talking of the old days of her happy, yet uneventful girlhood.

Strolling leisurely through Cavendish Square on her way home, Blanche fell to thinking of the afternoon: speculating where it might be that her husband meant to take her. Perhaps to Hampton Court: she had never seen it and would like to do so: she would ask him to take her there. Quickening her pace, she soon reached her own door, and saw an empty cab drawn up before it.

"Is any visitor here?" she asked of Sanders, when admitted.

"No, my lady. I have just called the cab for his lordship."

Lord Level came out of the study at the sound of her voice, and turned with her into the front room. She thought he looked vexed —hurried.

"Blanche," he began, "I find I have to run down to Marshdale. But I shall not be away more than a night if I can help it. I shall be back to-morrow if possible: if not, you may expect me the next day for certain."

"To Marshdale!" she repeated, in surprise and vexation. "Then you will not be able to take me out this afternoon! I was hoping it might be to Hampton Court."

"You shall go to Hampton Court when I return."

"Take me with you to Marshdale."

"I cannot," he replied, decisively. "I am going down on business."

"Why did you not tell me of it this morning? Why have proposed to ——"

"I did not know of it then," he interrupted. "How dismayed you look, Blanche!" he added, half-laughing.

"I shall be very lonely, Archibald—all by myself here!"

He said no more, but stooped to kiss her, and left the room, looking at his watch.

"Dear, dear, I did not think it was quite so late!" he exclaimed. Turning sharply, for he had been about to enter the study, he approached the front door, hesitated, then turned again, and went into the study.

"No, I can't stop," he said, coming to a final decision, as he once more came forth, shut the study door after him, and locked it, but did not take out the key. "Blanche, don't let anyone come in here; I have left all my papers at sixes and sevens. If I wait to put them up I shall not catch Jenning."

"Are you going to the train now, Archibald?"

"No, no; I want to see Jenning. I shall come back before going to the train."

Getting into the cab, Lord Level was whirled away. Sanders closed the house-door. And Blanche, ascending the stairs to her chamber, in the slow manner we are apt to assume after experiencing some unexpected check, and untying her bonnet as she went up, came upon her maid, Timms. Timms appeared to be in trouble: her face was gloomy and wet with tears.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed her mistress.

"My lady, I can't understand it. My belief is she has *stole* it, and nothing less. But for that dreadful sea-passage, there and back, I'd go over myself to-day, if your ladyship would spare me."

"Now, Timms, what are you talking about?"

"Why, of the box, my lady. I was that vexed at its being left behind that I scribbled a few lines to Victorine from Dover, telling her to get Sauvage not to delay in sending it on. And I've got her answer this morning, denying that any box has been left. Leastways, saying that she can't see it."

While Timms was speaking, she had pulled a note out of her pocket, and offered it to her mistress. It was from their late chambermaid, and written in curious English for Timms' benefit, who was no French scholar, and it certainly denied that the box inquired for, or any other box, had been left behind, so far as she, Victorine, could ascertain.

When departing from Paris three days before, Timms counting over the luggage with Sanders discovered at the station that one of the boxes was missing, left behind in their apartments by her own carelessness. The train was on the point of starting, and there was no time to return; but Lord Level despatched a message by a commissionnaire to the concierge, Sauvage, to send it on to London by grande vitesse. The box contained wearing apparel belonging to Lady Level, and amidst it a certain dark silk dress, which Timms had long coveted. Altogether she was in a state of melancholy self-reproach, and had written to Victorine from Dover, urging speed. Victorine's answer, delivered this morning, had completely upset Timms.

Lady Level laughed gaily. "Cheer up, Timms," she said, "the box is on its road. His lordship has had a letter from Madame Sauvage this morning." The concierge himself was no scribe, and his wife always did the writing for him.

Timms dashed her tears away. "Oh, my lady, how thankful I am! What could Victorine mean, I wonder? When was the box sent off? Does your ladyship know?"

"No—o. I—don't know what the letter does say," added Lady Level, calling to mind that she was, as yet, ignorant of its contents. "I forgot all about it after Lord Level opened it."

Timms did not quite comprehend. "But—I beg your pardon, my lady—I suppose Mme. Sauvage does say they have sent it off?"

"I daresay she does. What else should she write for?"

The maid's countenance fell considerably.

"But, my lady," she remonstrated, wise in her superior age and experience: "if—if your ladyship has not read the letter, it may be just the opposite. To pretend, like Victorine, that they have not found the box. Victorine may have spirited it away without their knowledge. She would uncommonly like to get some of those dresses for herself."

This view scarcely appeared feasible to Lady Level. "How silly you are, Timms!" she cried. "You can only look at the dark side of the case. As if Lord Level would not have told me had it been *that* news! I wonder where he put the letter? I will look for it."

"If you would be so kind, my lady! so as to set the doubt at rest."

That she should find the letter on her husband's table, Blanche no more doubted than that it was written by Madame Sauvage to announce the despatch of the box. She ran down to the study, unlocked the door, and entered.

The table was covered with quite a confused mass of papers, heaped one upon another. It seemed as though Lord Level must have been looking for some deed or other. A despatch-box, usually crammed full of papers, stood on the table, open and empty. At the opposite corner was his desk; but that was locked.

For a moment Blanche thought she would abandon her search. The confusion looked too formidable to be meddled with. Well for her own peace of mind that she had not done so!

Bending forward, for papers lay on the carpet as well as the table, she let her eyes range over the litter, slightly lifting with her thumb and forefinger a paper here and there, hoping to discern the required letter. Quite by a stroke of good fortune she came upon it. Good fortune or ill—which?

It lay, together with the two letters which had come with it, under an open parchment, close before his chair. One of these letters was from Mr. Jenning, Lord Level's confidential solicitor, requesting his lordship to be with him at twelve o'clock that morning on a special matter; but that had nothing to do with Blanche, or with us either. She opened the envelope of the one she wished to see, and took out its letter.

But it was not a letter; not, at least, as letters run in general. It was only a piece of thin paper folded once, which bore a few lines in a fine, pointed Italian hand, and in faint-coloured ink, somewhat difficult to decipher.

Now it must be premised that Lady Level had no more thought of prying into what concerned her husband, and did not concern herself, than a child could have had. She would not have been guilty of such a thing for the world. Any one of those parchments or papers,

lying open before her eyes, she would have deemed it the height of dishonour to read a word of. This letter from the wife of their late concierge, containing news of her own lost box was a different matter.

But though the address to Lord Level was undoubtedly in the handwriting of Madame Sauvage, the inside was not. Blanche strained her eyes over it.

"I arrive to-day at Paris, and find you departed for England with your wife and servants. I come straight on from Pisa without halting, to inform you of a discovery we have made; there was no time to write. As I am so near, it is well to use the opportunity to pay a short visit to Marshdale to see the child, and I start this evening for it; you can join me there. Pardon the trouble I give you. NINA."

With her face flaming, with trembling hands, and shortened breath, Lady Level gathered in the words and their meaning. Nina! It was the Italian girl, the base woman who had troubled before her peace of mind, and who must have got Madame Sauvage to address the letter. Evidently she did not mean, the shameless syren, to let Lord Level be at rest. And—and—and what was the meaning of that allusion about "the child?"

Leaving the letter precisely as she had found it, under the sheet of parchment, Lady Level quitted the room and turned the key in the door again. Not for very shame, now that this shameful secret had been revealed to her, would she let her husband know that she had entered. Had she found only what she sought, she would have said openly to him on his return: "Archibald, I went in for Madame Sauvage's note, and I found it. I hope you don't mind—we were anxious about the box." But somehow her eyes were now opened to the fact that she had been guilty of a dishonourable action, one that could not be excused or justified. Had he not locked his door against intruders—herself as well as others?

Passing into the front room, where the table was now being laid for luncheon, which they took at one o'clock, she drew a chair near the fire, mechanically watching Sanders as he placed the dishes on the table, in reality seeing nothing; her mind was in a tumult, very painful and rebellious.

Timms came stealing in. How any lady could be so indifferent as her lady when a box of beautiful clothes was at stake, Timms could not understand: sitting quietly there over the fire, and never coming back to set a body's mind at rest with yes or no.

"I beg pardon for intruding," began Timms, with deprecation, "but did your ladyship find Madame Sauvage's letter?"

"No," curtly replied Lady Level. "I daresay the box is lost. Not much matter if it is."

Timms withdrew, lifting her hands in condemning displeasure

when she got outside. "Not much matter! if ever I heard the like of that! A whole trunk *full!* and some of 'em *lovely!*"

"Will you sit down now, my lady, or wait for his lordship?" inquired Sanders.

Lady Level answered the question by taking her place at table. She felt as though she should never care to wait for his lordship again, for luncheon or anything else. In a few minutes a cab dashed up to the door, bringing him.

"That's right, Blanche; I am glad you did not wait for me," he began. "Sanders, is my hand-bag ready?"

"Quite, my lord."

"Put it into the cab, then."

He hastened into the study as he spoke, and began putting things straight there with a deft and rapid hand. In an incredibly short time, the papers were all in order, locked up in their various receptacles, and the table was cleared.

"Good-bye, my love," said he, returning to the front room.

"Do you not take anything to eat?" asked Blanche, in short and sullen tones, which he was in too great a hurry to notice.

"No: or I should lose the train."

He caught her to him. Blanche turned her face away.

"You silly child! you are cross with me for leaving you. My dear, believe me, *I could not help it.* Charley is coming up to dine with you this evening."

Leaving his kisses on her lips, but getting none in return, Lord Level went out to the cab. As it drove away, there came up to the door a railway luggage van. The lost box had arrived from Paris. Timms knelt down with extra fervour that night to offer up her thanksgivings.

Lord Level had snatched a moment to look in upon me, and ask me to dine with Blanche that evening.

"She is not pleased at being left alone, he said;" "but I am obliged to run down to Marshdale. And, Charley, she saw something about Tom in the paper this morning: I had to turn it off in the best way I could: so be cautious if she mentions it to you."

I had meant to look again after Tom Heriot that evening, but could not refuse this. Blanche was unusually silent throughout dinner.

"Is anything the matter, Blanche?" I asked her, when we were in the drawing-room.

"A great deal is the matter," she replied, resentfully. "I am not going to put up with it."

"Put up with what?"

"Oh—with Lord Level. With his—his deceit. But I can't tell you now, Charles: I shall speak to himself first."

I laughed. "More jealousy cropping up! What has he done now, Blanche?"

"What has he gone to Marshdale for?" retorted Blanche, her cheeks flaming. "And what did he go to Pisa for when we were last in Paris?" continued she, without any pause. "He *did* go. It was in December; and he was away ten days."

"Well, I suppose some matter or other called him there," I said. "As to Marshdale—it is his place; his home. Why should this annoy you, Blanche? A man cannot carry his wife with him everywhere."

"*I* know," she said, catching up her fan, and beginning to use it sharply. "I know more than you do, Charles. More than he thinks for—a great deal more."

"It strikes me, my dear, that you are doing your best to estrange your husband from you—if you speak to him as you are speaking now. That will not enhance your own happiness, Blanche."

"The fault is his," she cried, turning her hot face defiantly upon me.

"It may be. I don't think so."

"He does not care for me *at all*. He cares for—for—somebody else."

"You may be mistaken. I should be sorry to believe it. But, even should it be so—listen, Blanche—even should it be so, you will do well to change your tactics. *Try and win him back to you.* I tell it you for the sake of your own happiness."

Blanche tossed back her golden curls, and rose. "How old-fashioned you are, Charles! it is of no use talking to you. Will you sing our old duet with me—'I've wandered in dreams?'"

"Ay. But I am out of practice."

She had taken her place on the music-stool, and was playing the first bars of the song, when a thought struck her, and she turned round.

"Charley, such a curious thing happened this morning. I saw in the *Times* a list of some escaped convicts, who had been on their way to Van Dieman's Land, and amongst them was the name of Thomas Heriot. For a moment it startled and frightened me."

Her eyes were upon my face, so was the light. Having a piece of music in my hand, I let it fall, and stooped to pick it up.

"Was it not strange, Charles?"

"Not particularly so. There may be a hundred Tom Heriots in the world."

"That's what Archibald said—or something to the same effect. But, do you know, I cannot get it out of my head. And Tom's not writing to us from India has seemed to me all day more strangely odd than it did before."

"India is a regular lazy place. The heat makes people indolent and indifferent."

"Yes, I know. Besides, as papa said to me in the few minutes we were talking together before he went away, Tom may have

written, and the letters not have reached us. The mail from India is by no means a safe one, he says; letters often get lost by it."

"By no means safe; no end of letters are lost continually," I murmured, seconding old Carlen's invention, knowing not what else to say. "Let us go on, Blanche. It is I who begin, I think. 'I've wandered in dreams.'"

Wandered in dreams! If this misery connected with Tom Heriot were only a dream, and not a reality!

(*To be continued.*)

FREDERICK IMPERATOR–REX.

JUNE 15, 1888.

As never monarch lay in state,
  This hero lay—imperial, crowned
  With martyrs' thorn his forehead bound,
His throne, our hearts disconsolate.

And yet for him we might not weep,
  The strong man armed whose feet had trod
  A road of anguish up to God,
To whom, beloved, He giveth sleep.

Tears are for feeble aims and low,
  Sighs are for useless lives mis-spent,
  For him we triumphed! well content,
Even in our loss, to let him go.

He and his land forget their pain,
  In his exceeding weight of bliss,
  Their everlasting crown is his
Who suffer, and who also reign!

G. B. STUART.

EN VOYAGE.

SO Mabel is going to Rome! Happy she! and everyone else who can take wings of steam and fly to fresh lands and pastures new. For me, alas, no longer journey is now possible than from my bed, upstairs, to my sofa, downstairs. On that, I am stretched now.

The last loiterer over afternoon tea is gone, carrying Mabel's letter with her. To the cheerful tinkling of cups and tongues has succeeded a pensive silence, in which the ticking of the gilt clock upon the cabinet, the fluff-fluff of the fire, and the purr of Zoo-zoo, on the rug before it, are distinct and soothing. The shutters are closed, and the lined curtains drawn between us and the winter night, but the lamps have not yet been brought in. The room is full of a warm twilight, shed by that perfect fire whose steady glow is reflected in the tiled hearth.

For just such a warm nest as this, many a weary traveller, on land or sea, is now sighing. Being human, I, of course, would gladly exchange my shelter for the rush and change of travel. I close my eyes, rather ungratefully, upon the well-known picture, and wish that I, too, were on my way to Rome.

What is this weight upon my lap, and what immoderately high footstool is lifting my knees almost to my chin? Who is sitting crushed so close against me, and why does he or she choose a place so uncomfortable for us both? Why does the sofa jolt like ——

Where am I, then?

Seated, apparently, in an omnibus of some kind. A bundle of rugs fills my arms, and something which feels like a dressing-bag is under my feet.

The too close neighbour is Mabel herself, dozing, and perhaps, like myself, dreaming of home and comfort. I observe, opposite to us, the handsome but somewhat severe countenance of her mother, my Aunt Caroline. Who is that injured-looking person next her? Her maid, Wenham.

Poor Wenham, whom all the luxuries of Powell's Court failed to satisfy! What can have induced Aunt Caroline to bring you?

I am still too sleepy to be quite certain where we are. I catch through the window a glimpse of starry sky and lighted streets. Paris, I recognise you by your lamps. You wear them, not in stiff level rows, like London, but some high, some low, with the rise and fall of beauty's own line.

Stop, stop! Aunt Caroline cannot find her dressing-bag, and life

without it, even in Rome, is impossible. Everything is turned topsy-turvy, and we have all to rise; even the sleepy Mabel; when the missing treasure is discovered beneath its owner's skirts. Having made ourselves and the carriage thoroughly uncomfortable we subside.

Surely we are in the daylight, or daylight "a little sick." No, it is not the sun but science's counterfeit which is flooding this meeting-place of streets. In its pale but brilliant radiance the minor lights are dimmed, and the white and coloured globes show like large, softly-tinted jewels. We hear the whirl of carriages, passing and repassing, and the gay hum of those streams of chattering, gesticulating pleasure-seekers, on the pavement. The next moment, this rainbow-tinted picture is behind us. We have plunged into the comparative darkness of a side-street.

The change is favourable for reflection. Aunt Caroline, accordingly, mentally remembers all the boxes she saw placed on the omnibus, and arrives at the pleasing conclusion that the least dispensable of all has been left at the hotel. This opinion is only too well confirmed on our arrival at the station. Whilst our luggage is being weighed, Aunt Caroline and Wenham exchange rebukes and complaints over the forgotten portmanteau. The discussion ends in my aunt giving Wenham warning; a singularly happy arrangement, by which we have her throughout our journey when she is of no use, and lose her directly we return to England, when she might be of some.

Our carriage is found. We joyfully pull out our fauteuils-lits, and prepare for rest. Much shouting, slamming and ringing, and we are off. The lights and the houses become fewer and farther between. I lean out to take a last look at Paris, lying sparkling behind us. Farewell, siren of cities, brilliant, but unstable as water.

Our rest is postponed by a dispute between my aunt and cousin as to whether, to quote their own graphic way of putting the case, we shall perish from cold or from asphyxia. Mabel descants learnedly upon carbonic acid and oxygen; Aunt Caroline deplores the new-fangled fads of the rising generation. I, so overpowered with drowsiness that death either from suffocation or cold seems to me preferable to sleep deferred, suggest a middle course, by which the windows are shut and the ventilators left open.

Silence and repose ensue, broken only by occasional stoppages, with attendant bustling at lighted stations, and untimely offers of foot-warmers and refreshment.

The night has given place to day more than an hour, when, much against our inclinations, we are awakened by Aunt Caroline; one of those high-principled Englishwomen who always rise at the same hour and insist on everyone near them doing the same, at whatever time they may have gone to bed or to sleep. Her sense of method also requires that all the rugs shall be folded and strapped before

breakfast. Wenham is, of course, too incapable both in mind and body, for lack of her usual morning cup of tea, to be of much use.

After much struggling, three characteristic bundles are produced: Aunt Caroline's, compact and symmetrical, like a well-made roly-poly pudding; my own, fairly even, but flabby; Mabel's, a really disgraceful performance, shaped like a wedge, and with the corner of a fringed shawl protruding.

We are nearing Culoz. On either side of us rise rocky walls, so high and close that only by leaning forward and peering upwards can we see how bright and blue is the sky above us. Soon they fall back, and we are surrounded by hills, some near to us, dark and rugged; others, far off, soft and translucent-looking, as if of such stuff as clouds are made of. Their hues, varied like their shapes, are in all the delicate tones and semi-tones of colours that lie between dark violet and tenderest lilac. Each minute a new group is before us. Peace, Mr. Ruskin; nature thus viewed from the window of a railway carriage is not without its own peculiar charm. There is a strange fascination in watching these mountain forms and tints melting, kaleidoscope-like, into one another, as we sweep onwards.

Here is Culoz. A crowd of hungry travellers pour forth upon the platform and across to the breakfast-stalls. We catch fragments of many languages from the general Babel, as we rush off to try vainly to wash and be clean in ice-cold water and with soap of the consistency of iron, which the government mockingly provides. Afterwards we sup our welcome and hot café-au-lait like soup, with a spoon, whilst a waiter walks up and down shouting reassuringly: "Ne pressez pas, messieurs et dames; vingt minutes d'arrêt." And then we sally forth, still munching our sour rolls, to breathe the fresh air.

What air it is, this atmosphere of the highlands and the morning. No wine ever so gladdened the heart as this cup of Nature's own mingling, bubbling with ozone. We feel that we could dance for very pleasure; and, indeed, Mabel does perform a solitary trois-temps, to the music of her own singing. This is the joy of the old paradise, the delight of mere existence, carried by healthy blood to brains untroubled by care or aspiration. Oh, let us linger and enjoy it, and forget there are such things as time or tide, luggage and trains.

Fortunately, perhaps, Aunt Caroline's older and stronger head is less easily affected by the aerial draught. We are, by her, led off, unwilling prisoners, to be cribbed, cabined and confined once more in a dusty railway carriage. But our murmurings are soon hushed by the sight of the beautiful world, fresh with the bloom of early morning, now opening to us. Let us curl up into the corner and drink it in. There lies the Lac du Bourget, bright and blue as the sky it mirrors, and sheltered by the grand hills, whose bases are still steeped in the silver mists of morning. On a high rock, jutting into

the water, the picturesque Haute Combe lifts its towers above the trees that cluster round. What a home for romance!

The lake is gone, and meadows whose dewy grass takes a golden sheen in the sunlight lie between us and the hills. These are drawing nearer; so near we fancy our outstretched hands might reach them. Stern ramparts of stone they stand, unveiled and unsoftened by blade or leaf. Then they change, and put on a kindlier aspect, even as they seem to grow higher and steeper. Trees spring forth from their crevices, velvet moss and silver lichen tapestry their jutting spurs, tiny cottages nestle in their hollows; and on the broad ledges, steeped in sunlight, miniature orchards and gardens are blooming.

Oh, Savoy the beautiful! we seem to understand something of that charm by which you hold fast the hearts of your children, high and low. Was it on such a morning that the royal soldier said good-bye, on your frontier, to his Savoy guard? No marvel that he wept, though on his way to a throne.

And still, with every minute, the scene grows more majestically beautiful. The rock walls tower higher and higher. Little mountain streams fall down them, in long silver lines, their course fringed by dazzling icicles. Above them, stoop dark pines. And now, once more, the hills divide. See, through their parting, those iron-grey peaks fretted with glistening snow. That is our first sight of the Alps.

But farewell to beauty, sweetness and light; we are at Modena, and the ordeal of the custom-house awaits us. We stand in the unlovely judgment hall, near our luggage, impatiently awaiting the arrival of the inquisitors. Will they never come?

A sore conscience in Mabel's case adds its sting to the usual anxiety. She has in her trunk several packets of tea, intended to cheer the hearts of many exiled friends. "I warned you not to take them," observes Aunt Caroline. "You will have to pay six times their real value, when they are discovered."

But, as it happens, this guilty box is passed, with a short glance, by the officials, while they burrow pitilessly into Aunt Caroline's exquisitely packed layers of wearing apparel, on the insulting pretext of finding there hidden cognac and cigars. All that they do discover are dyed feathers which they maintain to be brand new and as such taxable.

As time is on the wing, and our appetites whetted by six hours' fasting, we retire to refresh ourselves, and leave poor Aunt Caroline to argue the point out. It ends in her missing the first four courses of the table d'hôte dinner, and only securing the last two by paying duty on these offending plumes.

The dinner is so excellent, we hope that even Wenham will be satisfied by it. But a six-course dinner does not soothe the sense of wrong, physical and moral, left by the absence of her usual eleven

o'clock lunch. It seems also that she had never understood that she would be expected to go without beer, which she requires three times a day to keep her from sinking. The substitute of sour wine she regards with patriotic scorn, and drinks under protest. Altogether, she is so exhausted with fatigue and inanition, that she can hardly support herself, far less anything else, so we have to carry her shawls as well as our own.

The short day is closing. En voiture, messieurs et dames. Our road, now, seems to go heavenward, in more than one sense, for the way is ever ascending, and the beauty around us increasing. Then we are plunged into thick darkness. Does our way lie through the valley of the shadow of death? If so, it is soon past, like other shadows. There is nothing between us and the pallid heaven, and the great mountains rising tier upon tier, wave upon wave around us.

A little pause gives us time to look and wonder. Very little is said. In our poor little store of words, we have none with which to speak of such beauty as this. Our worship shall be of the silent sort. Lips, thrice touched by the fire of genius, may strive to tell the secret in words, or colour, or music, but even they have hitherto left the best unsaid.

We move onward, with one last, long, awe-struck look. Night is near now. The sky, pure, deep and spotless, is of that indescribable hue which suffuses the upper air between light and darkness. Close to one white peak, a single star sparkles brilliantly. Farewell! Let us sleep, now, and dream of the beatific vision.

Our rest is interrupted by change and dinner at Turin. Here, a difficulty arises about the fauteuils-lits. My aunt's surname of Powell has been mysteriously transformed into Popkoff, during telegraphic transmission. Naturally a Russian lady is expected instead of this unmistakable Englishwoman. At last the stationmaster is persuaded that Powell is the English for Popkoff, and we are allowed to take possession.

We are so tired, that we sleep through all noise, and do not waken till next morning, when we are near Florence. I rejoice at the flooding of the other route which compels us to make this détour, and so enjoy a fleeting look at this beautiful city. But why is it that Florence always sulks when I come near her? It was so the first time I passed her; it is so again to-day. She wears a veil of thick white fog, which my own Southshire meadows might have woven.

When we depart, refreshed by café-au-lait, half-an-hour later, the misty screen is still there. We hear the ringing of many bells, and wistfully picture to ourselves the invisible towers from which the chiming comes. It is not till we reach Ostia that the thick cloud melts and reveals a true Italian sky, "deeply, darkly, beautifully blue," above us.

There is a rich afternoon light over the whole landscape, in which all colour seems to glow and deepen. Bright tints shine out in the faded grasses, on field and bank; the brown and sere leaves still clinging to wintry boughs gleam like burnished bronze; the low, distant hills are painted in tender tones of blue and rose and purple. Picturesque groups float past us of long, low carts, drawn by yoked oxen; dark-eyed peasant boys, with peaked, broad-brimmed hats, and women, young and old, with white head-dresses flapping over their brown faces.

But we gaze at it all, in a half-inattentive, half-impatient mood, as if we were reading the last pages of a novel, of which the end is the chief good. Rome itself is our goal, and we are restless till we reach it. Ecca. Mabel is disappointed, of course. She complains that it is smaller and less imposing than she expected.

Why does nearly everyone expect to find this mistress of hearts a tall, brilliant beauty? Of such, men quickly weary. It is the low, soft loveliness, hardly noticed at first, that creeps into human hearts, and makes there a steadfast throne. Look at the soft, warm hue of her stones. Now you know what ivory palaces look like. That enamel is from Time's own workshop. It takes him centuries of southern winters and summers to produce. Oh, queen of the seven hills, you look right royal this evening, with a canopy of orange clouds behind you, and over you a crown of golden mist. To think I shall tread once more your uneven but beloved streets.

But why does San Isidore clang so noisily? It is not yet the Angelus hour, and all the other belfries are silent. I know the bell, well; it is harsh and unmusical as the notes of a raven. It gets louder and louder; it drowns all other sounds; it deadens even my sight. The railway-carriage, Mabel's face, the shining city, all fade and vanish!

Alas; it was only a dream, then, scattered not by San Isidore's iron tongue, but by the even less melodious voice of the dressing-bell.

A CAPRICCIO.

A Love Story.

CHAPTER I.

MY GALLANT CAVALIER.

"SO this is London? Well, I do not see anything so very wonderful, Aunt Rebecca. It is only very noisy and dreary. I suppose it is market day as it is so crowded, and everyone seems to be in such a hurry?"

Aunt Rebecca frowned disapprovingly; glanced uneasily at our neighbours, then whispered to me not to chatter like an ignorant school-girl.

I was in London for the first time in my life. It is many, many years ago now, but none the less vividly do I recollect my first impressions of our great city, and my disappointment that there were no gorgeous palaces such as I had expected to see; for I was as unsophisticated a little rustic as it was possible for a girl of eighteen to be, even in those days when travelling was neither so easy nor so cheap as it is now.

I, Celia Random, had lived all those eighteen years at our quiet country home, amongst pleasant meadow-lands and golden corn-fields.

My father died when I was a child, and the family now consisted of my dear, good mother, my maiden aunt, Rebecca, my sisters, Maisie and Tottie, and of six great romping brothers, who grew out of their clothes with lamentable rapidity, and who kept the house in a constant state of excitement. A happier family could not have been found in the kingdom. Troubles seemed to pass us by, or, if they came, they fell with a lighter touch on us than on other folk, and life shone like gold before our eager young eyes.

But such a large family could not thrive upon nothing, and when I was considered to have reached years of discretion, it was arranged that I should try and earn something to help the boys' education, by going out as a "lady's companion."

That the thought was terrible to me I will not deny. But the boys must be educated, and I was always ready to do anything for those I loved. So my fate was sealed. My mother wrote to all her friends to inquire if they knew of any situation likely to suit me, or that I should suit; and, as a last great treat, Aunt Rebecca said she would take me to London for a fortnight, that I might have a glimpse of the great world before I left my liberty and my home behind me.

I was full of excitement when we at last reached London in the great, lumbering stage-coach. What a weary journey it had been, and how glad we were to know that it was over! We were staying with a bachelor cousin of Aunt Rebecca's, who had a small house in a fashionable quarter of the town, and who did his best to make us comfortable. He was a business man, who spent all his spare time at his club, so that we saw but little of him and had to find our own amusements. Not that we minded his absence. On the contrary, we rejoiced in our freedom, and in the knowledge that there was no cockney at hand to jeer at our ignorance, and at our naïve delight in things that were everyday matters to him. Aunt Rebecca delighted in acting Cicerone, and promised to show me all the sights and wonders. Indeed, she drew up a lengthy plan of campaign for each day, and was, I verily believe, almost as eager and excited as I was myself. However, when it came to actions, her courage failed her somewhat; and we did little the first day but wonder at the shops, the crowds, the bustle and hurry; and I was beginning to feel just a little disappointed, when our host, Mr. Greville, came and asked us if we would go with him to the theatre that night.

"Oh, yes," I cried, clapping my hands; "oh, how beautiful." But Aunt Rebecca drew herself up and pursed her lips.

"I am not sure that it is correct for young girls to go to such entertainments," she said; "not at all sure, my dear."

"Tut, tut. Let the child go. Everyone goes," said Mr. Greville. "Come now, Rebecca, I've settled it all, and go you must."

So we went; and whether it was correct or not for a young girl, I know not. But this I do know: that for one night, at least, I was in Elysium, and that if it had not been for Uncle Greville taking us to the theatre that night, this story had never been written.

For we had a little adventure, Aunt Rebecca and I, that I laugh even now to think of.

I thought that play the most beautiful thing I had ever witnessed. The lights, the gorgeous scenery and dresses, the sparkling beauty and vivacity of the actresses, fairly intoxicated me. I gazed open-mouthed, weeping silently during the tragic parts and laughing so openly at every jest that Aunt Rebecca at last felt it her duty to reprove me for my levity.

Nor was I much less interested between the acts. It was like reading a story-book to watch the different people around me—from the gay ladies with their beaux in the boxes, to the rougher audience in the pit, and to guess at their respective histories. I was deeply engaged thus, looking about me, when Aunt Rebecca touched my arm with her hand, and I heard a piteous whisper of:

"Celia, my dear."

Poor Aunt Rebecca! Her face was the picture of misery as she sat stiffly staring in front of her, like one turned into wood. I could not think what was the matter with her, and was just going to inquire

if she felt ill, when she continued, in the same agonised tone, and still staring fixedly.

"I cannot move, Celia. Is it not a young man?"

"What? who? where?" I asked, bewildered.

"On my head," she replied sepulchrally.

Then I perceived what had happened. A young man occupied the seat behind Aunt Rebecca. During the entr'acte he had turned round to look about him and, either in absence of mind or with intentional rudeness, had leant against the back of her stall. Now Aunt Rebecca dressed her hair in a peculiar long roll behind, rather like a broad sausage; over the sausage she wore a turban with long ends; and on this sausage and on the ends of this turban, the young man was calmly sitting, holding the good lady in a vice, so that she could turn neither to the right nor to the left.

Uncle Greville was soundly asleep; nothing but a firmly-administered kick would have roused him, and this Aunt Rebecca was too timid and too genteel to bestow. How then was she to be released?

"What shall I do, Celia?" she murmured. "I shall be strangled."

"*I* will tell him," I said. "I will tell him that he is very rude and underbred."

"What is he like, Celia?"

I took a longer look at the young man. He was tall and slim, with a boyish face full of such chivalry that my courage rose, and I felt no fear of my action being misconstrued. Touching him on the shoulder, I said clearly, but timidly:

"Please, sir, would you mind moving?"

He sprang up, and looked round in surprise. Then his face clouded with genuine distress.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, bowing with that old-world courtesy that is dying out so quickly; "I was not aware—indeed I had no idea of what I was doing. I was forgetful. What can I say to excuse myself? I beg your pardon a thousand times."

Aunt Rebecca bowed, blushed and murmured:

"Not at all—I am sure—pray don't mention it."

I could see that the young man was quite overcome with annoyance at what he had done. His eyes met mine and seemed to say so plainly, "It was unintentional. *You* will believe me," that my heart went out to him, and I smiled and nodded as if to reassure him that it was all right now. Then I blushed, not quite sure if Aunt Rebecca would approve of such familiarity, and did not turn my head round again for the rest of the evening.

But as we were leaving the theatre the young man was once more thrown in our way.

Mr. Greville had enough to do in guiding Aunt Rebecca through the crowd without troubling about me. I had to fight my way as best I could, and presently I found myself separated from my

companions by a sea of heads. It was all so new to me that I was getting bewildered and a little frightened, when a friendly voice said in my ear :

"You are alone. May I not be of service to you?" And looking up, I saw the young man holding out his arm to me with such a frank smile on his handsome face, that indeed I could not resist his offer.

"Thank you, sir," I said flurriedly ; "I have lost Aunt Rebecca."

He piloted me safely through the crowd, looking down at me once or twice with a half smile, but not speaking. I could understand that it was his delicacy of feeling that kept him silent. As I afterwards learnt, he was such a gentleman in words, thoughts and deeds.

When we reached Aunt Rebecca I let go his arm and dropped him a little courtesy, and wondered, even then, if I should ever see him again. Then, to my surprise, I saw Mr. Greville clap him on the shoulder with a hearty :

"Bravo, my lord! So you have tracked my little partridge," adding something in a lower tone and laughing.

"May I be introduced?" asked the young man.

"Certainly, certainly. Bless me! Rebecca, Rebecca; Lord Everril—son of our old friend—wishes to be introduced to you."

Whereupon the young man bowed, and Aunt Rebecca courtesied and told him that she had known his father and mother intimately, and that she remembered him as a baby.

It was such a balmy night that we decided to walk home; and somehow it came to pass that when Mr. Greville and Aunt Rebecca started off together arm-in-arm, I found Lord Everril still by my side.

"May I walk back with you?" he had asked Aunt Rebecca, with one of his quick smiles. "For old acquaintance' sake?"

But instead of escorting the maiden aunt, he had fallen back on the niece.

He was so unlike the men I met at home—so fashionable, so handsome, so courteous, that I was almost too shy to talk at first. But by degrees his genial manners thawed my constraint, and I found myself chattering away quite merrily. I told him all about home, about the boys, and how this was my first visit to London, and that I had never been to any gaieties in my life.

"Have you a wish for gaieties?" he asked, suddenly. "Now, for instance, would you care to go to the great ball on Friday night at the Duchess of R——'s?"

"*Care!*" I cried, clasping my hands. "Oh—but it is impossible."

"Not a bit. I can easily manage it," he said, eagerly. "Only promise me that if you are invited you will come."

I shook my head.

"I have nothing to wear—nothing smart. Do you not see how old-fashioned I am? And this is my best frock."

"Your friend Mr. Greville will see to that. Or stay! Come as you are," he answered. "That also must be a promise. And there is one other I would ask you to give me. May I?"

"I am not afraid."

"Promise to dance with me twice, thrice, four times on Friday."

"Why, that is easily promised," I said, simply. "I will dance with you as often as you like, for there will be no one else to ask me. But you have not Aunt Rebecca's permission yet; and I cannot be sure that she will let me go."

But here our conversation ceased. We had arrived at Mr. Greville's house, and he insisted on making Lord Everril come in to have some supper. (I wonder what my mother would have said to our eating at that hour of night!)

Lord Everril did not speak again to me, except to say, "Good-night." Instead, he devoted himself to Aunt Rebecca, and made himself so pleasant that, as she afterwards confessed, she could deny him nothing.

"Such a gentlemanly young man," she said, when we were going to bed, as she interrupted my rhapsodies about the play: "so courteous, so agreeable, and as well-favoured as one could wish to see. I hope I have done right, my dear, and that such vanities will not turn your head. He begged so prettily that I could not say him nay."

"The ball? Oh, Aunt Rebecca! Aunt Rebecca! Did you say yes? Are we going to it? Really—*really* going? Oh, you dear, good, darling old auntie."

I danced round the room until I was giddy; then dropped on my knees and laid my whirling head on her lap. It seemed too good to be true.

"Now, if you are so foolish, Celia, I shall feel it my duty to say no," said Aunt Rebecca, in her prim, old-maid voice, though a smile hovered round her mouth. "Remember that young men are not all to be trusted. And, 'Beauty is but skin deep.'"

"Yes," I said critically; "he has a beautiful face, and if he is not to be trusted, it will not hurt us, Aunt Rebecca. Oh, and he says I am to wear this gown at the ball."

"Vanity is a sin, my dear," went on Aunt Rebecca, rising. "It is time you were asleep; and remember, when you feel in danger of being overcome by vanity—remember, 'Beauty is but skin deep.'"

Before I undressed, I took one look at myself in the glass. I do not know why I did so, unless it was the effect of Aunt Rebecca's words. At all events, there was no fear of vanity overcoming me, I thought, for this is all I saw: a tall, slim figure, in a straight, high-waisted, white frock; a laughing face, with pink cheeks; merry eyes, dark, like sloes; and a wealth of brown hair, short and curly as a boy's. Nothing there to warrant Aunt Rebecca's warning, that "Beauty is but skin deep."

CHAPTER II.

SMILES.

My first ball! How well I remember it; the excitement and trepidation; the wonder if I should dance, or be doomed to help swell the ranks of forlorn damsels who stand in a formidable line along the wall, smiling sweetly, though their charms be passed by, and in their secret hearts sadly conscious that, as far as dancing is concerned, they might just as well be in bed and asleep.

Aunt Rebecca was far more sanguine in her expectations of enjoyment than I was. In her young days she had received a good deal of admiration, and, though she was now over forty, I think the good soul fondly imagined that she would find things just as they had been fifteen years ago. Whilst, in her affection for me, she assured me that I should be "a vast success," and that I should have no lack of partners.

I had my doubts; but, whatever befell, I was confident of enjoying myself, if only as an onlooker; and I feel certain that, when we arrived in the ball-room, no two people looked happier than we did. Indeed, Aunt Rebecca's face was wreathed in smiles, and she kept tapping my shoulder with her fan, saying delightedly:

"To think of it, my dear—to think of it! What would your mother say if she could see us now?"

There were a great many beautiful women and young girls; dressed, alas, so differently from me, and looking so much at home and at ease, as though they were quite accustomed to it all, as I suppose they were. I began to feel ashamed of my own simple, old-fashioned garments, and of my boyish curls, and fancied that all these other girls must be talking of and simpering at my rusticity. Some of the gentlemen, too, stared, then whispered together with stolen glances at me, until I was so overcome by shyness and false shame that all my hopes of enjoyment began to fade.

"We shall not know anyone here, auntie," I said at last. "Cannot we find a corner in which to hide ourselves? People stare so."

"Now, didn't I tell you so?" she replied, looking so provokingly happy that I could almost have believed she *liked* being stared at. "Hide ourselves? Why, Celia, you are not ashamed of your pretty, simple gown?"

"Oh, no. I am very happy. I am, indeed," I answered quickly, with some compunction for my foolish self-consciousness. "I know we could not afford to be better dressed. But——"

Well, I need not have cared how I looked, for, after all, it was more than probable that no one took the trouble to notice either me or my clothes. Remembering this, I felt quite happy again, and was soon wrapped up in the, to me, novel sight, when suddenly Aunt

Rebecca's fan came down on my shoulder with an energy that denoted an increased delight and agitation on her part.

"Ah, my dear, there he is," she whispered eagerly. "Now, did you ever see such a well-favoured, gallant young fellow before? Hold up your head, dear Celia, and do not drop your fan about in such an awkward way. Wave it gently; wave it gently."

Before I had accomplished this delicate feat, Lord Everril joined us and expressed his pleasure at seeing us again.

"And now, Miss Celia, may I have this dance?" he asked, after having spoken a little with Aunt Rebecca: "or are you very deeply engaged—as indeed you must be?"

"Engaged? No," I replied. "We know nobody here, Aunt Rebecca and I, and nobody knows us."

"Ah! We will soon remedy that," he said, leading me away, "for I have already been asked by several people if I could tell them the name of the young lady in white."

"Yes, I know," said I, looking disconsolately at my old-fashioned clinging skirts; "we must look very—odd—amongst all these beautiful people in their beautiful dresses. But all the same it is very rude of them to stare and make remarks."

Lord Everril laughed, and answered, with an amused glance at my doleful face: "Why, do you not know that it is the charms that——" he paused, muttering something to himself about "folly to be wise," then went on in a more careless voice: "Well, they can say nothing but good of you. And your gown is ravishing. We do not often see the unpainted lily here; and as for me, I prefer the flower in its native purity to the gaudy counterfeit that cannot bare its face to daylight. Shall we dance?"

We danced, then talked, then danced again, and once more talked, until I suddenly remembered Aunt Rebecca, and bethought me that she might be vexed and lonely if I stayed away so long. But Lord Everril assured me that he had seen her deep in reminiscences with an old friend whom she had not met for years; so I willingly continued to dance, and presently allowed my companion to lead me out on to the balcony. The great ever-wakeful town lay before us, all twinkling with lights, and looking something like that marvellous city of which I had dreamed before I came to London to find, like Dick Whittington, that my El Dorado is but an enormous, foggy and unromantic town after all.

"So this is your first flight into the world?" asked Lord Everril, after I had said something of this. "Tell me about your home."

"I have told you all. Are you not tired of hearing? We lead such quiet lives. But, oh! if you knew what happy times we have together; we and the boys, and Madge, and Dick Somers."

"Who is Dick Somers?"

"Dick? He is our greatest friend. In all our merry times it is Dick who makes us most merry and happy."

"Ah, the hero of your home," he said, looking at me intently. "Some village Adonis in fustian, with the strength and appetite of a bear, and—prominent feet."

"Dick a hero? If you knew him you could not say that. No, Dick is only the scapegoat of our village, who leads all the other boys into mischief. But he is very good at heart, and we have played together since we were all babies in the nursery."

"I was beginning to think he might be more than a friend. Will you believe me if I tell you that I was almost ready to hate him and to feel that——" He checked himself, with a half impatient look at my puzzled face; then added: "Come, you do not understand me, and I was talking nonsense. How long shall you stay in London?"

"Until Saturday," I replied. "After that I am going home again for a little while before I have to go away for good. This is a treat to make up for the dull life that is coming."

"Why dull? Surely you are not one of those people who always expect the future to be full of trouble? Do you mean that you are going to leave home?"

"Yes. I am going to be a 'lady's companion,'" I answered demurely, stealing a glance at Lord Everril to see how he liked this announcement, and whether he appeared ashamed of me now that he knew that I was going to work for my living. "Mamma is looking out for a situation, for she says that I am old enough now to be useful."

"You shall not!" exclaimed Lord Everril. "You are too young and too bright to become the slave of an ill-tempered old woman. You are an Amaryllis, meant to enjoy a life of freedom in sunlit meadows, with roses under your feet, and no cares to trouble yourself with from day's end to day's end."

"But you know we are very poor," I said simply, "and there are the little ones growing up. I must help mamma if I can, and take some of the care off her shoulders. Ah, you do not know what poverty means."

"Do I not? I am poor myself," he replied; "next door to the workhouse."

I laughed sceptically, and shook my head. To me, who had known all my life what it is to be one of a large family living on a few hundreds a year, it sounded a little ridiculous to hear this young man, who looked as if he had been born with half-a-dozen golden spoons in his mouth, talking seriously of being in want of money.

"You do not believe me?" he said. "But it is true. My uncle—whom my father succeeded to the title—left all his money to his only child, a girl; so that *we* are plagued with his name whilst *she* has the pleasure of spending his money. Consequently, here I am with barely enough to clothe myself with, whilst, what is far worse, it is supposed that the 'honour of the Everrils' is in my hands, and that I was sent into the world for the sole purpose of retrieving the family fortunes."

"Oh, then you too will have to work," said I innocently. "What are you going to do? I know someone who has gone out to America to make his fortune; but perhaps you would dislike leaving England. What do they want you to do?"

"Well, they have already chosen my profession for me. A nice, honourable, gentlemanly profession—no vulgarity in it—and warranted not to wear one out with hard labour. It is the profession of heiress-hunting, which perhaps you have never heard of."

He spoke with unconcealed bitterness, and after a moment's pause went on rather urgently.

"What would *you* do if your mother and half-a-hundred devoted relations were constantly imploring you, on bended knees, to accept £20,000 per annum from a beautiful cousin, *only* ten years your senior, saying that it is the only way of preventing the family name from falling into the gutter, and from dying out in ignominious pauperism? Of all curses, preserve me from a family name without family plate to uphold its dignity. Tell me, what would you do?"

"If I cared for the beautiful cousin, I should not be too proud to accept everything she liked to give me," I replied, hesitating lest I should say too much. "But if I did not care for her, I would take nothing; it would be like a coward."

"You are right. And I do not care for her. Let us forget her. Miss Celia, if I hear of an old and respectable lady who wants a companion, may I tell her of you?"

"It will be very kind of you," I said. "Now, will you take me back to Aunt Rebecca? She must be tired of waiting for me."

So she was, though she tried not to show it, and insisted on waiting until after I had danced with two elegant young men who were now introduced to me, and who seemed to have very small conversational powers—for one never soared beyond the weather, which we beat round on all sides; and the other evidently felt it to be his mission to persuade me that I was Venus, Helen of Troy, Titania, and the Belle of the present ball, all in one, and that he had never before felt his heart so stirred with emotion. All of which I had heard him say, shortly before, to a young lady with damp-looking curls and teeth like a post and rails, as Dick would have said; so that I was not much elated by the flattery.

After that Lord Everril took Aunt Rebecca to supper, and helped us on with our cloaks. And as he put mine over my shoulders he said, in a tone that made me blush and tremble for no reason, like a foolish schoolgirl:

"This has been the happiest evening I have ever spent, Amaryllis. I shall remember it all my life. Have *you* enjoyed it too, I wonder?"

"Oh, so much! I shall never, never forget it," I said, letting my hand rest for a moment in his, and looking up into his kind, handsome face. "And you have been so good to us. Good-night, Lord Everril."

"Good-night; may I come and see you to-morrow? Thank you; I shall come without fail. You will be gone next week. And I shall hardly know how to get on without—your Aunt Rebecca."

I slept very little that night. I was so much excited that strains of dance-music haunted my dreams and awoke me when it was yet early. Aunt Rebecca, on the contrary, slept the long sleep of exhaustion, until, in my impatience to talk over the events of the night before, I longed to awake her by fair means or foul, and was only deterred from doing so by the reflection that it might spoil her temper for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER III.

KISSES.

"So you are really going home to-morrow, and this is the last time we shall meet, for goodness knows how long?" said Lord Everril. "Are you sorry, Miss Celia, or are 'home' and 'Dick Somers' superior attractions. I—we shall all miss you here."

We were sitting together near the window. Aunt Rebecca had complained of being chilly, which was strange, considering that it was one of those stifling July days when no one and no thing—if we except flies—seem capable of stirring. I was afraid she must be feverish, and offered to mix her a cooling beverage; but she repelled my advances, and sent me back to where Lord Everril was sitting by the open window, idly pulling to pieces the begrimed leaves that straggled through it. We had no view beyond the crowded street, and there was a din of equipages in our ears that was scarcely the fitting accompaniment to soft speeches. But as far as we were concerned externals were of small account; to our eager eyes the horizon was boundless, the landscape aglow with sunshine and the glory of love and hope.

"Sorry!" I answered. "Of course I am; very sorry indeed. Even home will seem a little monotonous now."

"I wonder if you will remember me if ever we meet again?" he went on. "You will perhaps be married by then."

"Most likely," I said carelessly. "And you, too. We shall be two elderly and sedate personages, taking snuff, and always falling asleep, like Aunt Rebecca, after dinner."

I was determined not to reveal how sore my heart was at the prospect my own words held out to me. Lord Everril had never spoken a word of love to me, and it was no fault of his if I felt that no man could ever again fill the place that he had stolen in my heart.

He turned his face from me and began to speak gravely.

"You remember what I told you about my cousin and my own future prospects, or rather non-prospects."

"Yes," I assented, yawning. "Have you *done it* yet?"

"Not yet," he said, with a suppressed smile. "But I am expected to do so without delay. In fact, I am half-distracted. What is it my duty to do? Ought I to sacrifice myself for my mother, my family, and to keep up the old name—hang it! Or shall I go my own way, break my mother's heart, and let the world forget there ever was such a name as Everril? Remember I am the last of the race. If I had a son he would, of course, succeed to the title, but to a yearly income of no more than three thousand pounds. For myself I don't care a straw about family honours, and think them more bother than they are worth. But it seems selfish to cause real pain to so many people. It was my father's last wish that I and my cousin should marry. In fact, he almost bound me by a promise."

"Is she nice, your cousin?"

"Charming. But unfortunately she has her caprices. One of them is that she imagines herself to be in love with your humble servant. She has ideas in her head, and looks upon a *mariage-de-convenance* as the correct thing; and has even, to accomplish her end, declared that unless I marry her or the girl she selects for me, she will leave all her money to the greatest brute of a fellow that ever lived. There is a nice look-out!"

"But if she is so charming," I exclaimed aghast, "how could she ask you to marry her?"

"Well, she did not do it in so many words. But there are round-about ways of doing things of which you, Amaryllis, in your simplicity, know nothing. It is a kind of understood affair. Besides, I would rather marry my cousin than the alternative she has offered me, and she knows it. Now advise me."

"I suppose family pride and honour, and all that, are something like what I feel for my own little home," I replied, and my voice sounded very thin and silly and weak. "And if we had to let that fall into the hands of someone we disliked—oh, it would break our hearts to think of what my father would have felt. Then for your mother, it must be even worse, Lord Everril. And I think if you like your cousin, and she is so—so charming, you ought to marry her, and make everyone happy."

"Thank you. Your advice savours of worldly wisdom," he said slowly; and left me with a frown on his face, to join Aunt Rebecca at the other end of the room.

I supposed that unintentionally I had offended him. Men are always going off at a tangent; after all, I had only tried to be wise and brave. True love, I told myself, should be unselfish, or it is worth nothing. Why! what was that dropping down my cheek? Was it beginning to rain, or could it be a tear that watered the creeper with salt drops? I stamped my foot, gulped back a sob, and began to sing some merry ballad, though my voice seemed to come from

my shoes, and instead of the lively words I could only think of one doleful little speech, "Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Miss Celia," echoed a low voice presently. "You seem very happy."

I turned, and held out my hand, unable to answer.

Thus for a moment we stood face to face, the yellow sunlight straggling through the creepers on to his dark head, and warming our clasped hands.

Then suddenly Lord Everril's eyes filled with an eager passionate light, and before I could realise what was happening, we had parted; but not before he had bent down and pressed one swift kiss on my lips, and we had betrayed our mutual secret by one whispered word:

"*Celia!*"

"*Charlie!*"

CHAPTER IV.

LADY CORISANDE.

About three weeks later I found myself launched out into the world, drifting away from the old free life at home, where I had grown up, romping with boys of all ages, and lording it over my little sisters, as well as over my gentle, soft-hearted mother.

When I had actually parted from them all, for I knew not how long a period, I realised how dear they all were to me, and reproached myself for many thoughtless and wilful acts, by which I had been wont to obtain my own way. Well, all that was at an end. There would be but little chance now of my going within several degrees of my own will, for I was on my way to fulfil an engagement as "companion" to a widow lady of rank, and I knew that the situation was one which would entail no little exercise of patience and self-denial.

I knew but little concerning Lady Corisande de Mervil, beyond that she was a rich widow of English parentage. She had spent the greater part of her life in Paris, and there married a Monsieur de Mervil, who had died a few years since.

I imagined her as tall and solemn, in widow's weeds, and with a sepulchral voice that was fond of dwelling on things dreary and profound; and it was with no slight trepidation that I arrived at my new home.

The first impressions were, indeed, reassuring; and as my eyes drank in the fairness of the Sussex landscape, I began to think that if I were but allowed a little fresh air and exercise daily, I should be able to put up with a certain portion of annoyance and loneliness. In the warm August sunshine the corn-fields shone like polished amber; honeysuckle and sweet-briar, clustering in the wayside hedges, flung a delicious fragrance through the air. At a little distance I could see that the gorse was in golden and orange bloom on the

downs that stretched away in softly-swelling undulations towards the great chalk cliffs of the coast.

Brantwood itself was an imposing old building, finely situated amongst grand old trees, above which rose the turrets and gables of the castle ; and as I drove up to the entrance I felt very nervous, and insignificant in comparison.

The great iron-studded doors closed behind me with a thud that echoed down the long hall in which I stood, a slim, unimportant figure in clinging garments, gazed down upon by the glassy eyes of antlered heads of deer on the wall, and eyed with disdainful superiority by three stately and consequential footmen. All my courage and high spirits forsook me, and I looked round appealingly, devoutly wishing myself at home again.

"Walk this way, please," said one of the servants, whose ample waistcoat and broad, placid countenance imparted to him a certain air of sublimity which was awe-inspiring. And with that he slowly marched down the hall until he reached a red baize door. Here he paused to inquire mysteriously : "What name?" then threw open the door and shouted in stentorian tones :

"Miss Celior Randorm !"

The room was so darkened that at first I could distinguish nothing in it. But a rustle of silks in one corner, and a little exclamation of welcome guided me up to whom I supposed to be my mistress. Then my hand was warmly shaken, and a bright, foreign-sounding voice exclaimed :

"At last ! This is charming, Miss Random. I assure you that I have been on the verge of suicide every day this week from ennui, and you are just in time to help to revive my spirits. You must be tired. Are you hungry? I daresay you had a long and dusty journey?"

"Rather long," I answered timidly. "Thank you, I am not tired, or hungry ; but only a little dusty and —— "

"And shy? Why, you look a perfect baby. And I dare wager you are terrified of me. Dear me—what an idea ! Come, let me see you in the light. No doubt you are dying to see me, too, are you not? Expected to see a very old, ill-tempered woman, with crutches and spectacles?"

Laughing and chattering, more to herself than to me, she drew up one of the crimson silk blinds, and turned to scan me from head to foot, looking at the same time as if she expected to overwhelm my country-bred mind with admiration of herself.

Indeed, at the first glance, she did strike me as being a very beautiful woman. She was of middle height, with a graceful figure and tiny hands and feet ; her black hair was elaborately dressed, rising in a pyramid from off the shapely forehead, and curling with artificial regularity on her temples. Her colouring was bright, and rendered doubly so by comparison with her black eyebrows and sparkling dark

eyes; and the general effect was of a radiant vivacity that attracted my fancy. Evidently she was not much over thirty; and judging from her appearance, would not make a very hard or alarming mistress.

"My dear little Phyllis," she cried; "with your dark curls and piquante face you are ravishing, I can tell you. And how tall are you? You are a regular may-pole—just two inches above the correct height for a woman. Never mind—your figure will improve as you grow older. I like your looks, and I think we shall be good friends by and bye. But you must always be merry and gay, or I shall be in a dreadful bad temper—oh, dreadful, I can assure you. It is so dull, so dull here in the country, with no neighbours, except the dreariest of old bores, that existence becomes a misery—a despair. All you have to do is to amuse me, and to look after my precious Bijou and Mignon. Are they not angelic?"

"Yes, indeed. I am fond of dogs," I answered. Nevertheless, my heart did not go out towards the angelic Bijou and Mignon, as I glanced at the two pampered lap-dogs that were snoring in the most luxurious chairs in the room.

"I am afraid," I faltered, "that you will find me very—very unamusing. I have never been anywhere, or seen anything, and I am very ignorant."

"Yes; you are younger than I should have wished," she said, flinging herself back into her chair and yawning; "but you look as if you had plenty of *esprit*, in spite of your little shepherdess air. Remember, I am very capricious; and I have quarrelled with three lady-companions already. Now I will ring, and tell my maid, Justine, to take you to your room."

It did not take me many days to discover that Lady Corisande was, as she had told me, very capricious; and not only capricious, but decidedly eccentric as well. Her chief characteristic (and in justice I may add she had no worse fault) was an excessive vanity and love of admiration. It gave me quite a shock when I went to her room one morning before she had completed her elaborate toilette, to find her with half the beautiful bloom of her cheeks vanished, and her eyes a little less dark and brilliant than usual. She was really so handsome that she required no artificial aid, which is, to my mind, neither correct nor becoming. I felt myself blush with shame for her, and wondered what my mother would have said had she known that I was living with what she would have called "a be-painted French hussy," who, alas, spoilt herself by cosmetics, tight lacing, and dangerously high heels.

However, apart from this, Lady Corisande was, at heart, a far better woman than many I have known; for she was kind-hearted to the last degree, ready to make the best of everything, and of a warm, impulsive nature.

She was very good to me, and my life was happier than I could

have believed it possible when I separated from mamma and the children, and when I was no longer queen over all I surveyed, as I had been in our little world at home.

Yet it happened that now-a-days my thoughts did not always fly straight back home, as they would once have done. On the contrary, I often transported myself to a certain dingy little room in a London street, crumpling dusty leaves between my fingers, and listening to a certain eager voice that rang only too often in my ears. Generally, when I arrived at this stage of my reminiscences, I would feel Lady Corisande's keen eyes fixed on me, and she would cry laughingly:

"Ah! Celia. Of whom are you dreaming, Mignonne?" And like a baby I would blush and stammer out:

"Of nobody—nobody. Indeed, it is nobody."

But I am afraid she detected my little falsehood, for she used to laugh gaily, saying she understood what I meant, and that "nobody is sometimes the most interesting person in the world."

Then, glad of an excuse to mount her favourite hobby, she would entertain me with stories of her own successes in Paris, where, to judge from her own account, she had had all the world at her feet.

Evidently her marriage with Monsieur de Mervil had been one of those loveless matches arranged by the parents of both parties, which, to my unsophisticated mind, seemed so cruel and miserable and unromantic; and it was equally evident that Lady Corisande did not consider that the tie had been strong enough to warrant a very long widowhood. She informed me, in the most candid manner, that she had every intention of again assuming the bonds of matrimony, probably even within a few months.

One day I ventured to express my surprise that she had not done this sooner, since she had had so many suitors; and then without hesitation she confided to me her most private hopes.

"My sweet innocence," she exclaimed carelessly; "I suppose you think these little matters should be hidden in the inmost recesses of the heart, do you not? Well, you are young; and I," with a sigh, "thought so too when I was your age. However, I am now sensible enough to see that where the heart can go with the head, one may be sure that all is safe; whereas, if the heart goes one way and the head another, you must be cautious, for if you yield to sentiment or tender feeling you are doomed to unhappiness."

"Oh, surely," I interposed, "that is very selfish, madame?"

With her craze for appearing to be as French as possible, it was one of her fancies that I should always address her as madame, instead of by her long and ceremonious English title.

"Selfish and childish? Not that, but discreet. But I have done the best thing possible, and combined the two. My heart has gone forth," she went on, rather sentimentally, "to one who is in all respects worthy to be loved for himself. He is young, charming, noble; and it is for his sake that I have treated my other admirers

with coldness. Does it make my love any the less warm that this young man is also the one with whom, in a worldly sense, it is most desirable that I should unite? For him, it is, indeed, the most advantageous thing in the world; and, therefore, I have not the slightest doubt that in a very short time all will be arranged. He is coming here in a week or two, and you shall tell me what you think of him."

"Did you say he was young, madame?"

"Not quite twenty-two. That is nothing," she said, a little sharply, "for I am a young woman for my age, and it is only in England that you think of such trifles. I can assure you, petite, that before my—before he has been here a week, he will be my slave."

"I am sure of it," I assented. "But, madame, if he should not be worthy of you? If he should be thinking only of his own interests?"

"He is honour itself," she exclaimed, with real feeling. "When you see him, you will know how impossible it is to suspect ill of him. He is beautiful as an Adonis, chivalrous as a Bayard, adorable as an angel. Is he not, my Bijou? Is he not, my Mignon?"

"Ah! how happy she must be," I thought, with a little envious sigh. "She has roses with all the thorns plucked off."

CHAPTER V.

"OH, CHARLEY IS MY DARLING."

MONOTONOUS though Lady Corisande considered her mode of existence at Brantwood, to me it seemed quite gay compared with that to which I was accustomed. We sometimes attended garden-parties, joined pic-nics, or went to entertainments in the nearest town. Now and then we received visitors at Brantwood, where Lady Corisande made the most charming of hostesses. But she soon tired of this kind of existence, professed to be rapidly dying of ennui, and, to cheer her spirits, decided on having a party of friends to stay in the house.

The party was a small one, consisting of a French Comte D'Estrées, a gay married woman called Mrs. Finch, a young officer named Collier, and last, but not least, her lover, with perhaps his mother and two sisters. She would not tell me the name of this paragon—this Adonis, this Bayard, this angel—though she spoke so constantly of him and his virtues that, simply from weariness of hearing his praises rung so often, I began rather to dislike him than otherwise.

Knowing Lady Corisande's unfortunate propensity for imagining that every man she met fell in love with her at first sight, I could not help fearing a little lest her hero should disappoint her. A boy of twenty-one does not usually care to have a wife ten years older than himself, and Lady Corisande's affection for him seemed so genuine

that I dreaded the shock it would be to her feelings if he did not fully reciprocate it.

The Comte D'Estrées arrived two days before the rest of the guests. He was a dapper little Frenchman, with well-twisted moustaches, and a most irreproachable air of gallantry, both in his faultless apparel and elegant manners. I should have liked to send him for a good tramp after partridges, with Dick and Fred, over stiff turnips, and with rough hedges and fences to scramble over!

However, Lady Corisande appeared to find his society excessively pleasant; and if it had not been for what she told me, I should have imagined *this* to be the "adorable angel."

Sometimes I felt rather de trop in those days, and longed for the arrival of the rest of the visitors, hoping that the English element might be more natural and sympathetic to me than was the French one. Yet I should be ungrateful if I did not add that D'Estrées was really a very good and kind little man, who did not think his fine manners wasted even on an insignificant little "companion" like myself.

"Mademoiselle Celie laughs of me," he said one day, good-temperedly. "I am not as the English young men."

"Celia should go to Paris and see the world," remarked Madame; "she wants *chic*."

"Pardon! It would be to paint the lily," he replied, with one of his queer little bows. "Mademoiselle Celie suits her rôle—simplicity."

Left now a good deal alone, with nothing to do but attend to the comfort of the snoring Bijou and the snarling Mignon, I began to feel miserably home-sick and heart-sick, and longed to confide my hopeless secret to some sympathetic friend. I had sometimes wondered what it would be like to be what is called "in love"; but I had never imagined that I could so quickly yield up my heart to any stranger as I had done to Lord Everril. My feeling for him was not merely the dazzle and glamour and excitement of a girl's first passing fancy, but an all-enduring affection, such as none can experience twice in a lifetime. I was quite sensible of the folly of it all; it was more than probable that I should never see him again; and, besides, I knew, after what he had told me about his cousin, that it was best for him to forget me, as, perhaps, he had done already.

I did not like that thought, heroic though it sounded; and I remember one day when it was too much for me, and great tears began to roll down my cheeks in the most doleful way.

I did not hear Lady Corisande coming up behind me, until she laid her hands on my shoulders, and, turning my face up to her own, cried in surprise:

"What! my merry shepherdess in tears? Celia! Celia! you are thinking again of 'nobody'?"

"Oh, madame, I am very silly!" I said, trying to laugh through my tears. "But—but ——"

"Come, you must not cry; it will give you a red nose. Just see what you look like in the glass. That is not the way to improve your looks whilst 'nobody' is away. He will not know you again, petite. Now, I have guessed your secret so far; why will you not tell me the rest?"

"Because I want to forget it. It can never, never be anything. Oh, it is very unmaidenly of me to be like this! I don't know what Aunt Rebecca would say if she knew."

"So there are difficulties? And you love this 'nobody' very much?"

"Ah!" I began, eagerly; then paused, smiling.

I could not tell her what I felt for Charlie. She could not have understood; and, besides, there are some things one cannot talk about, even to one's dearest friend.

Fortunately, Monsieur le Comte entered the room at this moment, and Lady Corisande at once joined him, whispering to me as she passed:

"Child, I am in such a flutter! I have just had a letter to say that *he* is coming here to-day—this very afternoon. Feel my pulse, how it beats!"

I said "Yes," though it appeared to me that her pulse was perfectly calm and steady; and then I took up my work and retired to the front drawing-room, feeling, somehow, that I was not wanted by the other two.

I must confess that I was eager to see Lady Corisande's hero, and began to share her excitement, when a ring at the door-bell at last announced his arrival.

Even Bijou and Mignon stirred and blinked their drowsy eyes at me, as though roused to a feeble interest in the coming of their future master.

I could hear the servant with the sublime face and portly tread marching up the long corridor; then, with even more than his usual pomposity, he flung wide open the door, and announced—

"Lord Everril!"

For a moment the room seemed to have turned into a merry-go-round, and my head swam. Then I sprang up with an inarticulate cry, and both my hands were caught in a warm, loving grasp, and Charlie himself looked down into my face—Charlie himself was repeating gladly:

"Celia! *you* here? Celia?"

This is what met Lady Corisande's view as she came forward to welcome her guest. Her lover and her "companion" standing with clasped hands, gazing rapturously into each other's eyes, and oblivious of all else in the world beside, though Bijou and Mignon were snarling and yelping madly at their heels, as if trying to guard their mistress's rights and honour.

There was a moment of ominous silence before Lady Corisande could control herself enough to speak.

"Lord Everril and Miss Random appear to be friends," she said, in a high, freezing voice. "Perhaps I am intruding?"

Charlie and I shrank guiltily away from each other. I dared not speak or move, and though Charlie strove to look composed and natural, he failed to look otherwise than awkward and abashed; and as she watched us the anger in Lady Corisande's eyes flashed more and more fiercely.

But, to the relief of us all, at this crisis Monsieur le Comte d'Estrées, with a tact that won my everlasting gratitude, came to the rescue, and broke the awkward silence.

"No wonder," he said, "that Mademoiselle Celie is glad to meet with an old friend, who can bring her tidings of her family. No doubt Lord Everril has lately seen some of her relatives."

"Yes," said Charlie, quietly; "Miss Rebecca Random is one of my—oldest friends."

Here, indeed, was a pretty kettle of fish!

(To be concluded.)

TEARS.

THAT sorrow like a frost chilled all my blood,
Dried up the sources of my tears, and made
My very heart seem hard; in vain I prayed;
I could not move my spirit though I would,
And sick of one familiar neighbourhood
I hid myself, sought out some quiet shade
Wherein to bury youth and hope decayed;
For all my heart despaired of any good,
I knew not if the world had hardened me,
Or sorrow made me prematurely old,
Stricken with helplessness, if not with years;
But suddenly some flash of memory
Brought back old days, old dreams, old loves untold—
And then, oh then, the blessedness of tears!

GEORGE COTTERELL.

COMMON SALT.

By Alexander H. Japp, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

ONE of the most remarkable errors of a great writer was that of Dean Swift about salt. In his "Voyage to the Houyhnhnms," after describing his efforts to find food for himself, and his dependence upon herbs, milk and butter, he proceeds :

"I was at first at a great loss for salt, but custom soon reconciled me to the want of it ; and *I am* confident that the frequent use of salt among us is a luxury, and was introduced only as a provocative to drink, except where it is necessary for preserving of flesh in long voyages, or in places remote from great markets. For we observe no animal to be fond of it but man ; and as to myself, when I left this country, it was a great while before I could endure the taste of it in anything that I ate."

Swift is sometimes guilty of gigantic jokes, even when he is most sardonically in earnest ; but here he cannot be regarded as humorous and playful : nor would he have knowingly laid himself open to the risk of being charged with ignorance of nature or of science.

Here he certainly is in error. Salt is as needful to animals as to man ; and some of the most remarkable phenomena of the animal creation is due to the need for it, and the powerful if not irresistible impulse to gratify the craving. Some diseases in animals, indeed, can only be cured by salt. The peculiar effect of feeding on salt-marshes in restoring sheep to good condition is well known, and the remarkable impulse which directs herds of animals from great distances at certain seasons to the "Salt-licks," or earths impregnated with salt, is well known. The migration of the lemmings, which has astonished so many travellers in the colder regions, is probably due to this cause.

Those who know about the proper treatment of horses and cows are well aware of the simple method by which the risk of deficiency of salt in the food is provided for. Lumps of rock-salt are put into the mangers or scattered over the pastures. It is often mixed with hay. Even bees and other insects will with avidity sip a solution of salt ; men will barter gold for it in countries where it is scarce ; and for it husbands have been known to sell their wives, and parents their children.

In hot countries it is even more a necessity as we shall see, than in colder ones.

In India, that is British India, the State takes advantage of this with a view to the Exchequer, and heavily taxes salt ; in some places not even allowing the poor peasants to drive their oxen to the "salt-licks," that they may not escape from the full payment of this severe

tax. Salt water lakes abound in Southern Africa, but Mungo Park relates that in the interior districts, where salt is exceedingly scarce, it was regarded as the greatest luxury. He tells that he frequently met little naked children sucking lumps of rock-salt like sugar-candy. To say of a man in that region that he eats salt with his dinner was to signify that he was a person of wealth and station. In Abyssinia, and no wonder, salt ranks as a precious metal, which it is; and there, as in other parts of interior Africa, is used as money is used in other countries—it is a medium of exchange. Professor Max Müller, indeed, on this ground, traces the verb *sell* itself to the root *salt.*

The Abyssinian carries small pieces of salt about with him, and the highest honour he can show to a friend or guest is to present him with a piece or to let him taste it.

The necessity for salt is universal with all living creatures. Salt is found everywhere. Indeed, except air and water, nothing on this globe exists in such a quantity or is so universally distributed. Nature has stored it up in veins in the earth; has spread it like hoar-frost over vast plains; has dissolved it in swamps, in seas and inland lakes; it is in solution in all springs. It is an important constituent in the blood of all creatures; a component of their bones, and of the flesh which covers them. It is hidden in trees; and the sap which stirs and trembles through every fibre in vegetation would become slower, at length sluggish, and cease altogether were it not for the salt that also seasons their life.

Chemically it is known as chloride of sodium—a name given to it because of its chemical constituents. It is a combination of two very simple bodies in certain proportions. In 100 parts of salt there are 60·4 of chlorine and 39·6 parts of sodium.

It furnishes one out of many instances of the wonderful changes which come over substances when chemically combined, and which form the unceasing wonder and charm of chemistry, as the doorway to mysteries and to endless possibilities of discovery and invention. Here we have, indeed, a transformation as surprising as any fairy scene.

Chlorine is a yellow gas, and sodium is a metal of silvery lustre, which will burn in the open air, and burn spontaneously in water. Combined in the proportions given above, they produce the white substance with which we are all so familiar that it ceases to be regarded with any special interest. It is only *common* salt. It is twice as heavy as water, in which it is soluble; 100 parts of water dissolving 37 of the salt. It dissolves much more quickly in sea-water than in fresh, owing to its affinity to the salts already there.

As regards solubility it is but little affected by temperature. If you warm a piece of salt, and throw it into sufficient water to dissolve it, it disappears almost instantly. The air has little or no effect in dissolving or moistening it. That the salt we use gets moist and melts in some circumstances is due to the fact that the salt of commerce is

seldom quite pure, as a chemist would judge it. Minute quantities of magnesium chlorine are, we are told, present in it; and this is one of the most easily damped or melted of all substances by the moisture of the air.

But this detracts nothing from the health-giving effect; nay, is rather said to add to it, alike in the physical economy of man, and in the animals, and in nature. By absorbing moisture from the atmosphere it keeps the earth damp, and thus increases the nourishment of vegetation, besides destroying many kinds of insects, caterpillars, grubs, etc. The earth, the air and the sea are thus one vast laboratory for the preparation of salt, in which incalculable stores of life and health and strength are being continually produced and preserved.

That remarkable genius and clever chemist, Dr. R. Angus Smith, whose mind delighted to dwell on the common things of life and nature, and to reveal their wonders, has some very fine passages about salt.

In his work on "Air and Rain" he finds himself under the necessity of directly connecting tempests and storms with the distribution of salt. He inquires, "How comes this salt to be present in soils far inland, hundreds of miles it may be, from the sea?" And he supplies this answer, "One of the uses of storms is to supply the world with salt. The salt is brought by the travelling clouds, each vesicle charged with a precious burden, sent up by evaporation from the surface of the ocean." And he winds up by asking, "Are there not traces of a superintending Mind in this vast system of 'demand and supply'?"

He further suggests that these same travelling rain-drops, swiftly borne on the wings of the tempest, not only serve the purpose of great salt-carriers, but at the same time act, in some degree no doubt through the very presence of that precious antiseptic, salt, as powerful scavengers in clearing the air of noxious gases and also as subtle fertilisers, bringing down ammonia and nitric acid to the earth.

Small as they are individually, in their combination they form also a great earth-plough, by corrosion of the rocks, loosening the particles by processes most gradual, and then by aggregation of fine loose particles forming fresh soils.

And not only this: they are great burrowers and penetrate, by the tiniest veins and fissures, down to the dark under-world, there to continue their most salutary work. They dissolve the mineral constituents prisoned down below, and set certain of their elements loose for their needful and beneficent purpose above, and thus all our plant food is presented to us and to the animals in the proper state for assimilation. Pursuing their journey to the nearest river, they finally return to the ocean. No single drop, however, goes back empty. Each is laden with an invisible burden of salts, held in suspension and drawn from the rocks and surface soil through which it has passed.

In this way, in return for the salts supplied to the rising vapour, the ocean receives back those necessary for marine vegetation, and the all-essential lime for the shells of the mollusca; for the work of the coral-builders, the pearl-producing bivalves, and all the rest of this class.

So it may be said that the air circulates, the rain-clouds form and float, the storms sweep from sea to land, the tempest roars, and in a sense the sun itself kindly shines, to carry on the salt-supply, to equalise distribution and to purify the world and make it habitable, healthy and beautiful.

And in the seas themselves, though we are wont to speak of *the* "salt sea," as if it were all uniform, there is constant variability. Currents and streams are there too, and there is continual flow and change and variation. All parts of the sea are not equally salt; the waters at one spot are not always uniform; nor are all seas of the same saltness, as the Dead Sea, or Salt Sea of Scripture, is enough to tell us. Temperature and evaporation, which is constantly modified by temperature, are the two great agents in this modification; rains, too, and streams constantly falling into it have their own influences.

Salt water and fresh mingle slowly. The fresh water passes away from the shore, and in many cases proceeds a considerable distance, directed, as it were, by the ocean currents, before it wholly assimilates with and is lost in the salt water that encompassed it. We know this for one thing from the difference of colour between the salt water and the currents of fresh water. Heavy rains, too, will sometimes rest for a definite period, floating oil-like on the top of the salt water, so that those at sea have been able actually to secure fresh water from the surface of the ocean by hollow vessels or by absorbing it in woollen cloths or sponges and then drawing it up.

The reason why some inland seas are more salt than the great ocean is that there evaporation proceeds more quickly than the supply of fresh water. This is the case with the Dead Sea. Others, again, receive supplies of fresh water more quickly than evaporation proceeds, and are more or less fresh. The Mediterranean Sea is much more salt than the Baltic, and for the same reason. The Black Sea is almost fresh, from the enormous quantities of fresh water poured into it continually and the slowness of evaporation there. It contains only 0·17 solid parts per 1,000, while the English Channel on the average contains 35·23, and the Dead Sea as much as 245·80.

Salt, as may already have been inferred, is got in three forms, the processes through which it is put varying according to its source; and these we shall try very shortly to describe. There is (1) rock-salt, which is obtained from mines; it is found among stratified rocks, and has been formed from water mainly by evaporation. Then (2) there is the salt from the sea; and (3) there is the salt found scattered over the surface of the earth at certain parts in such a quantity as to render collection of it profitable.

(1.) The accepted theory about the formation of rock-salt is that it is the result of evaporation on the bed of estuaries or rivers, when these have either dried up or have changed their course; other deposits of silt and earth forming over the bed of salt, and the rock being formed by natural pressure through gradual processes.

This is proved by the fact that fossils of zoophytes, univalves and crustaceans, and other specimens of creatures still found living are to be discovered in it, which proves also that rock-salt beds, though gradually formed, do not require a very lengthened or indefinite period of geological time. Indeed, it is a comfort to know that salt is thus being formed day by day throughout the world in at least an equal ratio with the consumption of it, and unlike our coal-seams, has no prospect of being exhausted even at the most distant period.

Scientific men tell us that the ocean itself has been the source of all rock-salt; and this fact only adds another to the many wonders of the subject: since evaporation is always so busy; and the salt, after all, does not settle on the sea-bottoms, so far as we know.

The salinity of sea-water has been ascertained to decrease with its depth; and from the forms of life found at great depths and other circumstances we know that the bed of the ocean is not salt. Salt is found in every aqueous formation. The most extensive deposits in the world are in Europe—extending for over 500 miles along the Carpathians; in some places with a width of a hundred miles, and a thickness of about 12,000 feet. The mines of Upper Austria, Hungary, the Tyrol, Salzburg, Transylvania, Wallachia and others belong to this range.

The Vieliczska mines in Poland are the largest in the world. Although they have been worked since 1251, the resources of the mines have been hardly touched. Already there are from thirty to forty miles of gallery, and the extent of this of course is being increased every year. In our own country there is a vast bed of salt under the valley of Cheshire, stretching all the way from Malpas to Congleton. At Northwich there is a mine which has been worked since 1670. And one of the phenomena observed by travellers in that region who do not take any particular interest in salt or its chemistry is the irregular subsidence of the houses owing to the mining and brine-pumping. They nod and bend towards each other at some points in the most remarkable manner.

In Spain there are some extensive salt mines; and at Cordova there is a mountain of salt upwards of 500 feet high. In Nevada there are still more wonderful salt-mountains, transparent almost as glass and almost as white as snow.

Rock-salt is worked at various depths and various heights.

The Vieliczska mines are some 860 feet below the level of the soil and 300 feet below the level of the sea; while in Arbonne in Savoy the salt is 7,300 feet above the sea-level, actually among snow peaks.

Rock salt, too, is mined in various ways; sometimes it is quarried by water; but this is in most cases found to be an expensive process; and the most common method is simply with pick, crowbar and gunpowder.

Wherever water touches the rock-bed there are likely to be brine-springs; and sometimes brine-springs are artificially made by boring and introducing water.

Even after mines have been opened, it has often been deemed advantageous to dig pits within the mine and flood them with water to dissolve the salt, so as to procure the brine without the labour of mining. The brine is then pumped up or drawn off, and the salt in solution crystallised in the ordinary way.

In England, salt was derived from brine-springs long before the beds of rock-salt were disclosed and worked. William the Conqueror instituted an inquiry into the "salt-houses" in operation in the time of Edward the Confessor; and Henry the Third, when at war with the Welsh, caused their brine-springs to be destroyed that they might be deprived of salt. The beds of rock-salt, from which the springs originated, were not discovered till 1670.

(2.) The next great source of salt supply is the sea itself. The usual method of obtaining it is by estuaries or backwaters, or by artificially constructed places called "salt-gardens." At certain seasons the sea rushes with great force into these spaces, and then when the tide falls or the storm is over, the mouth of the estuary or "garden" is closed with sand or otherwise, leaving the backwater—which evaporates and leaves a saline deposit—in some cases really a bed of salt, or very strongly impregnated brine, which is either conveyed away or pumped into the receptacles necessary for its further purification.

(3.) Swamps.

In some cases these are formed by sea-floods in low-lying places, where the sea-water is retained and evaporation leaves a deposit of salt; in other cases walls of mud are built to keep a greater quantity of the water. In these cases the product is called "spontaneous salt."

Sometimes, in exceptional situations, the rain causes the salt, which exists in too abundant measure, to ooze out of the soil and to crystallise. This is called "effloresced salt." Sometimes, too, when the shore of a sea is formed of a particular loose kind of sand, which has a retaining hold over the salt, the water percolates inland for some distance, depositing salt as it goes. Wells are sunk, and then the sea-side districts yield a brine more saline than the ocean, and this is then dealt with in the ordinary way and made to yield its quota of salt.

ROY'S GOOD SAMARITAN.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion," &c.

"MY dear Geoffrey! You must get Roy out of it in some way. The idea is preposterous! *My* son, Fitzroy Pierrepoint, the heir of Branxholme, marry an obscure librarian's daughter! It's altogether out of the question, Geoff, and I rely on you to prevent it."

"But, my dear aunt——"

"Now, Geoffrey, you can't desert me," and Lady Lucy Pierrepoint held out her pretty hands imploringly. "Have you not always been my refuge in all Roy's scrapes? And this is the worst and most desperate of all. If only he had never spent that month at Uskebank!"

"It was very unlucky. Roy is just the sort of susceptible fellow to fall in love with every common-place woman he meets. And he always *did* turn his geese into swans."

"No doubt the girl is an artful, designing wretch, and did her best to entrap my poor boy."

"Have you any plan to propose?" and Major Pierrepoint pulled his long moustachios thoughtfully.

Lady Lucy shook her head in doleful despair.

"I hardly know. Roy seemed terribly obstinate when I spoke to him the other day; but," brightening, "perhaps *you* could do something with him, Geoff? He has always looked up to you. Do try, this very evening, and beg, threaten, coax or bribe him out of it. I should think no sacrifice too great."

"Would you even consent to that Australian trip he has been bent upon so long? Six months' absence would cure him."

"Do you think so? Then persuade him to give her up and go, dear Geoff. I shall bless you for ever if you only succeed."

But Major Geoffrey Pierrepoint had several têtes-à-tête with his wilful young cousin before he could lay any claim to his aunt's promised blessing, and when, at the end of a week, he again turned up in her boudoir, it was with rather a rueful countenance.

"I've won Roy's consent, but only on condition that I interview the girl myself and get her to release him. It's a horrid business!"

"But, Geoff, that is all we want. How clever of you! And if the girl is 'difficult,' you know, I shall think a thousand or two well spent in buying her off. Offer what you like."

Thus liberally commissioned, and provided with Miss Bevan's address, Major Pierrepoint took his unwilling way, next morning, towards the gloomy regions of Bloomsbury, wondering within himself what sort of syren such a *triste* neighbourhood could have

furnished to beguile his butterfly cousin. Indeed, the librarian's daughter might never have crossed Roy Pierrepoint's path at all, but for a fishing expedition he had made the previous autumn to an out-of-the-way Monmouthshire farmhouse where the Bevans also had their holiday-quarters.

"Geoff, old boy, if it *must* be done, do it tenderly," had been his cousin's parting words, but Geoffrey felt anything but tenderly disposed towards this inconvenient disturber of the family peace as he sought among the dingy houses in Great Russell Street for the particular one described to him as that inhabited by the librarian and his daughter.

All this time, in a dark front parlour, not many paces distant, a girl, singing blithely over her work the while, seemed trying to convert the dull sitting-room into a background more worthy of her. And yet not that either, for the unconsciousness with which Una Bevan wore her crown of beauty was its greatest charm.

Upon the table near lay a heap of bright laburnum blossoms, which she was arranging deftly in quaint-shaped flower-glasses, and disposing about the faded room, which sadly needed a little cheerful colouring.

"He will see, at least, I've made the best of the old place," she said to herself, as she paused a minute to admire her handiwork. Then, with a hasty glance at the clock—"Twelve o'clock! He will be here directly!"

She gave a comical look of dismay at the heap of flowers still on the table; and, in truth, at that very moment a sharp ring at the front-door bell brought a sudden blush to her cheek. Una tried to recover composure as she lifted a pair of tall specimen-glasses, from which a golden rain of blossoms trailed prettily, to their place on the Queen Anne mantel-shelf of carved wood high above her head. The blush had almost faded as she turned to greet the visitor announced by the little maid-of-all-work. And then a sudden shade of disappointment fell upon the bright young face. Major Geoffrey Pierrepoint was a personable-looking man, but—when one was expecting Roy!

The intruder, however, whose brown eyes were taking in every detail of the room and its occupant, advanced with a bow (Geoff's bow was always superb!), and going straight to the point, as was his wont, began boldly: "Forgive this intrusion, Miss Bevan: you expected my cousin. I am here to explain the reason of his non-appearance."

His listener's face involuntarily clouded as she exclaimed quickly: "He is not ill? Has met with no accident?"

"Don't be alarmed. He is perfectly well; and yet"—with a pause kindly meant as preparation for his tidings—"I am the unwilling bearer of ill news."

"Yes?" Her paling cheek betrayed her uneasiness; but she said, still calmly: "I am forgetting hospitality. Pray sit down."

Perhaps she herself was not sorry to sink down upon the faded chintz couch behind her. Major Pierrepoint carefully avoided looking at his companion as he took a chair opposite, near enough to note how nervously, in spite of her outward calm, she twirled the ring upon the fourth finger of her left hand. He began to fear—this kind-hearted Geoffrey, who was not so cynical as he looked, not so *insouciant* as he would fain be supposed—that his task might prove even more disagreeable than he had expected. The victim whose happiness he had come to blight was so young, so innocent, so light-hearted; a very different being from the "artful wretch" Lady Lucy's imagination had painted. She was also so—so—not *pretty;* why! *pretty* would be the very tamest of adjectives as applied to Una Bevan! While trying to find another more suitable, Geoff mentally catalogued her charms: "Item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes with lids to them ——"

But he stopped. No inventory could tell how sincere, how earnest, how trustworthy were those self-same eyes, now grey, now hazel; nor describe the strong, sweet curves of the well-shaped mouth which seemed even in silence to speak its owner's character. Una Bevan was *lovely*—nothing less; Geoff could not help admitting it. He half repented of his ungracious mission, and decided that his first care should be to ease his own shoulders as much as might be of the burden laid upon them.

"I ought to explain," he began, with unusual diffidence, "that I am here to-day merely as the ambassador of my aunt, Lady Lucy Pierrepoint, who is deeply distressed to hear of the unwise—a—arrangement existing between you and her son."

"Do you refer to my *engagement*"—emphatically—"to Mr. Fitzroy Pierrepoint?" The well-cut features stiffened into frigid iciness, and Miss Bevan drew herself up ever so slightly.

"I do. My cousin can scarcely have explained his position truly, or you must see the folly of supposing such an—engagement could ever be carried out. The estate of Branxholme is unentailed and entirely at Lady Lucy's disposal; should Roy marry without his mother's consent, he will forfeit his inheritance."

"Well, and what then? My engagement is not to the heir of Branxholme, but to Mr. Fitzroy Pierrepoint."

"Granted: but *il faut vivre!* Remember that my cousin has no profession, and is dependent upon his mother's favour for even the bread he eats. My aunt, Lady Lucy, is a proud woman. If you had more experience of the world and the world's ways, you could not fail to understand how much this marriage which her only son proposes goes against the grain with her. Excuse my plain speaking."

"I do excuse it. In this matter you are but the mouthpiece of Lady Lucy Pierrepoint, who condescends to explain herself through you."

The quiet scorn in her eyes would have annihilated anyone less tough than Geoffrey Pierrepoint. But he only smiled cheerfully as he said, with unruffled good humour, "I hope I may tell her, then, that my errand is accomplished, and that Miss Bevan's own good sense prompts her to release my cousin without delay from his foolish promise?"

"You may do no such thing. What is Lady Lucy to me, that I should consider her prejudices? Mr. Pierrepoint is of an age to know his own mind. Poverty, to me at least, is no novelty; and if we choose to endure it together, who dares interfere?"

There was a proud flash in her grey eyes, and her swift look at Geoff was such a challenge that for a moment he could not find words to reply. In the pause the door opened, and a grey-haired man, bent rather with infirmity than age, slowly tottered into the room with the help of a stick. The likeness his handsome features bore to those of his daughter proclaimed at once the relationship between them. Her manner softened instantly. She sprang to meet the new comer, put his hand upon her strong young arm, and with infinite tenderness supported him to the well-worn leather chair in the chimney corner, where she hastened to make him comfortable with footstool and cushions.

All this time she totally ignored the visitor, who, having risen and closed the door again, was waiting in some embarrassment till she should make him known to the master of the house. When the brief introduction took place at last, Geoffrey was unprepared for the old librarian's courteous greeting and apology for an invalid's infirmities. He spoke with an air of culture and good breeding which made one forget his shabby coat and poverty-stricken surroundings, and Geoff felt ashamed when he thought of the blank cheque in his pocket and his aunt's offered bribe.

"We know one Mr. Pierrepoint already, sir," Mr. Bevan said, with a host's gracious dignity. "Anyone of that name is welcome for his sake. Isn't it so, Una?" turning to his daughter, who still hovered about his chair.

An involuntary faint colour tinged her face which had been so pale before, and once more Geoffrey Pierrepoint marvelled at its rare beauty. To her father her slight embarrassment seemed only natural. His eyes rested upon her proudly, with a smile that was like a benediction, and then turned inquiringly upon the visitor, as though claiming the admiration Geoff was not loth to give. But he presently remembered his errand, and pulled himself together sternly.

"I am an invalid just now, sir, as you see; and must leave my daughter to entertain you," Mr. Bevan went on. "I know you are in good hands."

Major Pierrepoint bowed, and murmured something inarticulate, wondering how his business was ever to be concluded; for something in Una Bevan's face as she stood with her hand on her father's

shoulder seemed to warn him not to mention it in the old man's presence. The master of the house himself relieved him from his difficulty.

"Una, Major Pierrepoint has just made acquaintance with *one* of my treasures; I should like him to see the other. Take him into my library, and show him the collection of rare editions, which has cost us many a sacrifice of small luxuries. You may find something to interest you, sir, even if you are not, like myself, a bibliomaniac!"

Major Pierrepoint, nothing loth, seized the opportunity, and with eager thanks followed Miss Bevan into a sunny little parlour, literally heaped with books, tier upon tier, from floor to ceiling; piles of others, mostly in antique bindings, lay about also on every available resting-place. But the visitor was allowed no time for inspection. The sunbeams dancing in played upon the time-worn volumes, some in their pathway lighting on the slender form of Una Bevan as she stood facing Major Pierrepoint—tall, erect, defiant.

"Well!" she cried, impatiently. "Have you anything more to say?"

"Only this," he answered gently; it was his last and weightiest argument. "No one who really cared for Roy Pierrepoint could wish to spoil his life so utterly as this foolish marriage must do. With all his good qualities, he has neither the stability nor the health to make his own way in the world, hampered with a wife whose social position is inferior to his own. His friends, his family, would turn against him; his mother ——"

She put up her hand and stopped him suddenly.

"I should be extremely sorry to incur the displeasure of such a great lady as Lady Lucy Pierrepoint, but I cannot give up my affianced husband even at *her* bidding. Only Mr. Pierrepoint's own wish can put an end to our engagement. He is capable of managing his own affairs without the interference of any third party," with a haughty glance at Geoff. "Let him choose between his mother and me."

The frozen calm had melted now. Just as an opal now and again reveals in transient gleams the hidden heart of fire beneath its tranquil surface, so for once Una Bevan's overwrought feelings escaped her control.

"He *has* chosen," Major Pierrepoint said gently, with a curious half-ashamed feeling for this fainéant head of his house, whose excuses he was making neither for the first nor second time. "Great as the trial is, my cousin yields to his mother's better judgment. He would—would be willing to accept his dismissal."

"Then let him tell me so himself!" she cried defiantly. "Who are you, to come between him and me? A word from himself would suffice, but not volumes of argument from either you or his mother. I think," rising with a proud glance, "I think we need not prolong this discussion."

"Wait one moment, Miss Bevan. Perhaps this will convince you I am speaking truth."

He took a letter-case from his pocket, and found among the contents an envelope, bearing his own eagle-crest, addressed to Miss Bevan. Geoffrey felt very full of pity for the girl as she took the note and read its brief contents. Then she raised her head, and looked steadily at Major Pierrepoint as he stood opposite only in haste to have it over and be gone. "You know the contents of this letter?"

"Yes." (Having dictated it himself, there was no room for denial.)

"I am satisfied," proudly, coldly. "You may tell Lady Lucy her son is free; and for himself ——"

She paused. Geoff was reassured by her calmness.

"Have you any message? My cousin talks of leaving England shortly."

A bitter smile curled her well-cut lips. "The precaution is unnecessary. But, as you are such a willing go-between, there is this ring ——"

She took a scrap of paper from a Davenport near, drew from her finger the ruby-studded ring which was its only ornament, and, with hands that never trembled, made of it a little packet which she gave to Major Pierrepoint. "*That*," she said, "will speak for itself."

He bowed in silence, and turned away. There was no more to be said. A moment later, he had closed the door upon the calm, emotionless, beautiful face he should, in all likelihood, never see again, congratulating himself that it could be so calm still. After all, the blow was a blow to ambition, to pride; for, possibly, even a librarian's daughter might have her pride as well as a peer's; but the fresh young heart at least was undaunted. This was Geoff's crumb of comfort. He had been worldly-wise, but not cruel.

The small maid-of-all-work was not forthcoming to show the visitor out. He had to grope for his umbrella in the dim hall, and his unaccustomed fingers fumbled a minute or two with the intricacies of the latch. When the door was at last open, he suddenly remembered that he had left his letter-case behind him. He shut it again with a bang that shook the house, and, going back to the library, pushed open the unfastened door with an apology on his lips which was arrested in the utterance.

In the shabby leather chair, near the table, sat Una Bevan, her arms resting upon it, her head bowed down between them in an agony of grief. Her whole frame was quivering with convulsive, noiseless sobs, as Geoffrey Pierrepoint stood irresolute, while his accusing conscience said, with stern upbraidings: Behold your work! His pocket-book lay on the table, within reach of his hand; but he had forgotten his errand—forgotten everything but the unhappy victim of Pierrepoint pride cowering before him in the intolerable misery of this rude awakening from her brief dream of happiness.

Perhaps there was some magnetic fascination in his intent, compassionate gaze, for presently the pretty head, with its be-ruffled curls, was lifted suddenly, and a pair of grey eyes, scorched by hot tears, confronted Geoff fiercely.

"*You*, again! What! Have I still more to bear from you? Or are you come to feast your eyes upon my misery?"

To the full as wretched as herself, Geoff stammered his excuses, snatched up the unlucky pocket-book, and somehow got to the door. There a sudden impulse seized him. He stepped back to the table, and, leaning across it, said earnestly: "Miss Bevan, try to forgive me the pain I have caused you, and don't think more hardly of me than you can help. Mine has been an ungracious errand. If I had known in the beginning all that I know now, I think—perhaps—I should never have undertaken it."

It was a great, almost a traitorous admission, but Geoff felt more comfortable after making it.

"I wonder shall we ever meet again?" he said to himself, as he walked away. "Well, one thing, she must hate me now, heart and soul. She might forgive me my errand, but never my having witnessed her humiliation. Heigho! If I had been in Roy's place I'd have stuck to such a prize through thick and thin, and snapped my fingers at all worldly-wise advisers."

II.

It is early spring-time in the year of Grace, 1887.

In a handsomely furnished sitting-room on the first floor of the Hotel Millefleurs, in one of the favourite health-resorts of the Riviera, two people are sitting in earnest conversation. The one, a lady, reminds us faintly—for she is greatly changed—of the Lady Lucy Pierrepoint of ten years since. From the bronzed face of her companion look the pleasant brown eyes of her nephew, Geoffrey Pierrepoint. He has changed, too, has grown older and graver, and his thin face shows traces of recent illness. Ten years have brought him promotion and several grey hairs. Colonel Pierrepoint is on his way back from India, where he has been serving with his regiment these many years past, and now, preferring to loiter in warm latitudes till winter is a thing of the past, he has come to join his aunt on the Riviera.

Their talk had been of melancholy subjects in the old familiar strain, for even in this their first meeting after a long separation, Lady Lucy had fallen naturally into her old habits of confidence. Geoffrey was so reliable, a tower of strength to the poor woman who had in her character an ivy-like tendency to clutch at the nearest support.

"I have always trusted you as a son, Geoff; in a way you have been more comfort to me than my own poor boy. And now that

Fitzroy is gone you must take his place; you are my nearest kinsman and my heir." Then looking up at him plaintively: "You won't grudge a little of your time to Branxholme and to me? It will all be your own some day."

Geoffrey was a man of few words. He got up, and bending over his aunt, kissed her faded cheek; a silent recognition of his new responsibilities towards her. And then for a few moments poor Lady Lucy broke down and sobbed audibly. Her loss was but a few weeks old, and the sight of Geoffrey had recalled it to the childless mother in all its first freshness. But it was a relief to talk of her son to so patient a listener, and Lady Lucy soon dried her tears.

"Poor Roy! He had been ill for months, but it was almost sudden at the last; and, as I wrote you, I did not reach Brodighera in time to find him alive."

"But his wife was with him?"

"Poor thing! Such a helpless creature! I've settled a handsome annuity upon her and packed her back to her friends in Australia. Not my style at all! No air! No manner! (Between ourselves, not even a lady!) I don't know how the poor creature would have managed all alone but for Mrs. Beaudesert."

"Mrs. Beaudesert?" questioned Geoff. The name was new to him among his aunt's acquaintance.

"Yes; Mrs. Beaudesert. All through Roy's illness she was kindness itself, both to him and his wife. I believe she had met poor Fitzroy somewhere long ago; and when she found them at Brodighera apparently friendless, and"—with a sigh—"hard up (for it seems he had gambled away his last napoleon at the Monte Carlo tables), the good creature took pity on them, moved them into comfortable rooms and sent all sorts of luxuries for Roy's use. Poor fellow! he did not want them long."

"And where is *Mr.* Beaudesert?"

"Dead, these three years. He was a younger son of Lord Villebois, a judge in India, and tremendously clever they say. Wrote legal works—'Beaudesert on Marriage Settlements,' or something of the kind. I daresay you've heard of it, though *I* never did."

Geoffrey shook his head. "Not in my line, aunt."

"No, dear Geoff. I wish it were. You must really begin to think seriously of settling now. You have done your duty to your country, now consider your duty to Branxholme. As head of the family, I must provide you with a wife as soon as possible. I know two or three people who would suit."

"Do you? I don't," said Colonel Pierrepoint, with a smile. "The only person who ever kept her place in my heart a day was —— Well, *you* wouldn't have approved of her for a niece."

"Indeed! I'm so anxious to see you married, Geoff, that I would overlook a great deal. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Beaudesert," announced a garçon, throwing open the door before Colonel Pierrepoint had time to answer, if, indeed, he had intended answering at all.

If Geoffrey Pierrepoint had made any mental picture for himself of poor Roy's good Samaritan it was quickly blotted out by the original, as ideals often are.

There entered a stately figure in trailing sable robes whose very severe simplicity had a grace of their own. Two hands enfolded Lady Lucy's, and then as Geoff drew himself up tall and straight, two clear grey eyes met his. In what vague dream had that beautiful face frowned or smiled upon Geoff before? He began to believe then and there in the theory of pre-existence: the eerie feeling of familiar strangeness deprived him for the moment of his presence of mind.

"Your visits are always *àpropos*, my dear," Lady Lucy was saying, "but to-day especially so. This is my nephew, Geoffrey, of whom you have heard me speak. Colonel Pierrepoint; Mrs. Beaudesert. I mean you two to become great friends."

Perhaps it was this rather ill-judged speech, perhaps it was the Colonel's awkward consciousness of looking ill at ease, and, therefore, at a disadvantage, perhaps Lady Lucy's mention of Geoff had been over-abundant. Whatever the reason, Lady Lucy's favourite and Lady Lucy's nephew did not take to each other comfortably.

Meetings were naturally unavoidable; and on these occasions each was studiously polite to the other and would put on a semblance of good fellowship which quite deceived Lady Lucy. But both tacitly conspired to defeat her plans for throwing them together. If the Pierrepoints were going to drive and Lady Lucy invited Mrs. Beaudesert to accompany them, she preferred walking that day. If a walk was in question—for Lady Lucy attempted more now she had her nephew's arm to lean upon—Mrs. Beaudesert had arranged to receive friends at home. Geoff wondered that Lady Lucy never saw through her friend's too transparent excuses. He did: and pride fired him to second Mrs. Beaudesert's efforts at avoidance.

She usually walked in the morning with some of her friends, lunched *apart*, and rarely honoured the table d'hôte with her presence; but as Geoffrey smoked his cigar in the verandah after dinner he sometimes perceived the stately figure of his aunt's friend among the scattered groups listening to the band. The Honourable Mrs. Beaudesert had many acquaintances among the hotel visitors, all of whom apparently felt themselves honoured by her notice. But the exclusiveness of the beautiful Englishwoman was so well known that it was considered rather an event when she chose to show herself in the public rooms.

One evening she came sweeping past the dark corner of the verandah where Pierrepoint had ensconced himself to watch the moon glimmering upon the tideless sea. Prince P——, an Austrian *chargé d'affaires*, was walking with her and doing his utmost to obtain one of

the rare smiles so coveted by the little circle of admirers whom she kept at a respectful distance. As Mrs. Beaudesert passed Geoff, the moonlight shining upon the fine face whose paleness contrasted with the crimson silk wrap flung about her head, her dark trailing dress caught upon the iron scroll-work of the table which held Colonel Pierrepoint's *café noir*. He sprang up and released her, and as he raised his hat in silence she recognised him with a grave bow. A strange thrill ran through him at this brief contact even with the hem of her garment. This cold, proud Englishwoman who held herself so aloof, what odd spell attracted him to her? What subtle instinct made him divine her tastes, opinions, wishes—hear her every word, whether addressed to him or not—become suddenly conscious of her presence in the most crowded assembly? He was vexed with himself for being unable to ignore her, yet he despised the poor wretches who sat at her feet craving as it were a crumb of notice from her bounty.

Many among them envied his opportunities, for about this time Lady Lucy caught a chill which confined her to her rooms. They were in the west wing of the hotel, close to those occupied by Mrs. Beaudesert, who spent much of her time with the invalid. Often as not when Geoff paid his visits to his aunt he would find Mrs. Beaudesert in her favourite low chair by the window overlooking the purple Mediterranean, doing her best to cheer poor Lady Lucy, who was depressed and out of spirits. She showed to especial advantage in these tender moods of womanly compassion, and—while they were united in the common task of amusing Lady Lucy—was for the time being less distant to Geoff

He was almost selfish enough to feel sorry when his aunt's health improved, and she was able to pace the garden, leaning on his arm, for convalescence relaxed her claim on her friend's society, and Mrs. Beaudesert resumed her usual long country walks with other acquaintances who had lately felt themselves neglected. Geoff rarely saw her now except on Sunday, when, like himself, she was a regular attendant at the English church. He was annoyed to find himself counting the days every week to this red-letter one, and determined to make one desperate effort to break the spell which bound him. Luckily the arrival about this time of an old friend who was yachting in Mediterranean waters gave him an opportunity of escape; and Pierrepoint gladly accepted Sir Fergus Farquharson's invitation to take a short cruise with him after the Carnival. Lady Lucy was well enough to spare him now; he would return later and escort her back to England. In the interval Mrs. Beaudesert might leave M——; probably they would never meet again.

As their acquaintance was so nearly at an end, Geoff permitted himself the indulgence yet one more Sunday of passing a blissful hour or so in the same church with her.

On his way to Lady Lucy's rooms, before service, he met Mrs. Beaudesert in the hall. She was already in walking dress, and carried

in her hand a large bunch of Saffronia roses. One nestled at her throat, its delicate hue contrasting finely with its dark foliage. Geoff, as he gravely greeted her, glanced jealously at the privileged flower, but his heart sank within him. Was she not going to church on this his last Sunday? He ventured to inquire.

"Oh, yes. But first I want to visit the cemetery. It is still early, I believe; you will have time to look in upon Lady Lucy."

Geoff, however, managed to make his visit as short as possible, for he, too, had resolved to take the cemetery on his way. Perhaps he might overtake Mrs. Beaudesert, and secure a few more words to treasure up in his memory when he had looked his last upon her.

But when he presently reached the peaceful God's-acre, there was no trace to be seen of Roy's Good Samaritan but a handful of fresh Saffronia roses upon his, as yet, unmarked grave. So she had not yet ceased her tender charities!

Her kindly feeling it seemed extended itself to all the world but him. What was this unaccountable prejudice which came as a shadow between them? While he lingered—for it was a pleasure now even to haunt the place where her feet had so lately trodden—and puzzled over the problem for the fiftieth time, something lying on the ground, half hidden by the flowers, attracted his attention. He stooped and picked up a small hymn-book bound in red calf, which he had often seen in Mrs. Beaudesert's hand. He opened it and looked on the fly-leaf for the owner's name. Yes, there it was: "Una Bevan, from her dear father, June, 1877."

"Una Bevan!"

A light flashed upon Pierrepoint. The mystery was explained, the vague haunting remembrance, the prejudice, the strange avoidance, the old friendship with Roy! And with the revelation came a sudden awakening as he realised with a keen sensation of mingled joy and shame, that he had followed in his cousin's footsteps. His long unscathed heart was touched at last, and by that self-same Una Bevan whom in the days of her blithe girlhood he had put to such painful humiliation. What hope remained to him!

Looking across the barrier which his own hand had raised between them, he knew that he loved—and loved in vain.

III.

Mrs. Beaudesert's salon, au premier, boasted a stone balcony overlooking the Mediterranean, which was a favourite haunt of hers.

This afternoon she sat with her book, alternately reading and musing, as she lifted her eyes now and again to the peaceful scene before her. It was the closing day of the Carnival: she felt absolutely secure from interruption in her retreat, and was, therefore, mildly surprised when a visiting card was brought to her, promptly followed by its owner, Colonel Pierrepoint.

He stepped out into the sunshine as she rose to meet him in momentary embarrassment and some wonder at his visit, the first he had ever paid her.

"You are surprised to see me," he began quickly, in a tone almost of apology, "but I am leaving M—— to-morrow, and want first to restore a certain piece of your property. I should have done so before, but that we have not met since Sunday."

"Indeed! I have not missed anything. Oh! yes, I have though! —my dear little hymn-book! Is it possible you have found that? I shall be so glad, for it was my dear father's last gift to me."

"Then I am lucky, for I have it safe."

"That is good news indeed! You shall have some tea as a reward. Take this chair; I am expecting Lady Lucy presently—like myself, she ignores the Carnival."

"Thanks, I cannot stay; my friend Farquharson is on shore for the gaieties, and is coming to dine with me."

But he still lingered, looking down upon her, a tall figure framed in the doorway. He had taken a desperate resolution, and was summoning courage to carry it out. There was an uncomfortable silence. Mrs. Beaudesert stretched out her hand to the laburnum blossoms overhead and gathered a spray. Perhaps as she did so she felt again the pain of a spring morning long ago, of which the golden blossoms always reminded her. The remembrance of it anyway came over Geoff as he watched her playing with the flowers, and made him miserable.

He took the shabby little calf-bound book out of his waistcoat-pocket, opened the fly-leaf where the *Una Bevan* confronted him in faded ink, and handed it to Mrs. Beaudesert.

"So it is this which has stood like a shadow between us all this while! I only found it out yesterday, though I have been haunted again and again by some vague resemblance. Well! it is fair and just that Mrs. Beaudesert should avenge the wrongs of Una Bevan, and I do not complain. I know how you must have hated me for all I made you suffer. I've hated myself many a time when the recollection came over me; but the hour of your triumph has come. Against my will you compelled my admiration then; against my will you have compelled my love since."

Geoff spoke stiffly, proudly, as though forced into the confession. Mrs. Beaudesert meantime stood leaning against the balcony, with an expectant look in her grave, grey eyes.

"You are and ever will be the one woman in all the world for me," Geoff went on in his blunt, simple way. "In telling you so, I make what amends I can, and offer you all that a man can do to take or to leave—myself and my life's devotion. Revenge the past if you will!"

A burning blush had risen to Mrs. Beaudesert's white brow, and for a moment her eyes fell before Geoffrey's, while she still plucked

mechanically at the blossoms within reach, severing them one by one till they fell in golden rain around her. Perhaps it was the sight of the bright petals scattered at her feet as her life's happiness had once been that roused the old spirit within her. She stepped forward, her hands clasped, her beautiful eyes dilating.

"Revenge! Ah! what would I not have given ten years ago to buy one hour's revenge on you and on a world which had so slighted me! Did you realise what you were doing that April morning when deliberately, in cold blood, you slew my love—my hope—my self-respect? Did no thought of the happiness you had wrecked haunt you as you took your self-complacent way back into the world again, leaving your victim prone and prostrate in her valley of humiliation? See!" growing calmer with a faint smile, "the Una Beaudesert of to-day is not so unlike the Una Bevan of long ago, for the memory of the girl's wrongs has still power to stir the woman's anger. I might have grown all hard in my misery and desolation, but, thank Heaven! a kind hand was outstretched to my rescue. The time came when I learned what a good man's love can be, and what a base counterfeit had deceived me before." She sighed; and Geoff noticed that tears were trembling on her long lashes. He waited in respectful silence, his eyes turned upon her beautiful face with a wistful heart-hunger; but Mrs. Beaudesert quickly recovered composure; she had early schooled herself to self-control.

"I had been a widow three years when I met your cousin again, ill—dying, wanting the very necessaries of life."

"And his extremity was your opportunity for heaping coals of fire upon his head?"

"I was glad to be able to relieve his necessities," she said, with a simple dignity which became her well. "He recognised me as I stood by his sick-bed, but to this day Lady Lucy does not know that 'Roy's Good Samaritan'—as she loves to call me—was Roy's discarded love."

"Yet you have admitted her to your charity?"

"It would seem so," colouring. "I have even grown fond of Lady Lucy, strange as it may appear."

"Then it is only myself that you cannot forgive. Well," after a pause, "I would rather have your hate than your indifference, at least so I am sometimes in your thoughts. Indeed, had things been different, something tells me that my love, always pleading with you, must some day have prevailed. Ah, you turn away! but, even now, perhaps, the time may come when your heart will soften towards me, and ——"

If an emphatic denial were springing to Una's lips, the sudden entrance of Lady Lucy, bearing her pet pug, Toby, in her arms, spared her nephew the pain of its expression.

"Geoff! the very person I am looking for. This dear dog is so pining for a little air and exercise, but Barrington has gone off for a

carnival holiday, and it is quite out of the question for *me* to venture out. Will you take Toby for a little run, Geoff? Just for half-an-hour?"

Geoff resigned himself to circumstances, for his mission was accomplished. While his aunt lavished her endearments upon Toby he went quietly up to Mrs. Beaudesert. "Is this farewell?" he asked softly.

With averted eye she silently put her hand in his. He sighed. "Ah, well, of course I knew the hopelessness of it all. Good-bye, and try to forgive me."

He had expected nothing better, nay, deserved no other treatment at her hands; but the thought did not sweeten the bitterness of the draught as he left her presence with his heart heavy within him. Sir Fergus did not receive the heartiest of welcomes when he came to keep his appointment. Pierrepoint was distrait, pre-occupied, and during the first quarter of an hour at dinner his eyes kept wandering towards the door by which Mrs. Beaudesert usually entered. He knew not whether he was glad or sorry that her place remained empty. Sir Fergus, too, between the plats, raked the table with his eyeglasses, too busy looking about him to notice his host's abstraction. But anon he turned to Geoff.

"Pierrepoint, I want you to do me a good turn presently. There's someone staying at the Millefleurs whose acquaintance I am very anxious to make—a Mrs. Beaudesert, Lord Villebois's daughter-in-law. *The* Mrs. Beaudesert, I ought to say, for she is unrivalled. She has lately bought a fine property near my people in Somerset, and they all rave about her. Beaudesert, I'm told, just idolised her, and he has left her absolute mistress of a tremendous fortune."

"Indeed!" Geoff managed to make his tone provokingly indifferent.

"Did you ever meet him? He was one of our ablest Indian judges, and only to be in his company was a liberal education."

"I never heard his name till I came here," Geoff answered stiffly. "And don't set your heart on seeing her this evening, for she's not en evidence."

He turned the subject hastily and plunged into talk with their vis-à-vis who were discussing Spiritualism, Buddhism, and other kindred *isms* of fashionable philosophy, with all the enthusiasm of Athenians of old for some new thing. Geoff was an old-fashioned fellow in many ways, and opened his honest eyes in sheer perplexity at the new lights of these nineteenth century iconoclasts, who, having long ago cast down the old time-honoured idols, seemed to be exalting others with feet of clay to their vacant niches. The vagaries of modern thought are not soothing to a mind saddened and pre-occupied, yet, perhaps, they were hardly responsible for the nuit blanche which succeeded for Pierrepoint.

Some strange unintelligible influence was abroad. Even the very brute creation seemed conscious of something malign and untoward

in the atmosphere, for Geoffrey, tossing upon his bed sleepless and wretched, could hear the howl and barking of dogs in the silence of the night, and the disturbed cries of the birds.

Towards morning he fell at length into a restless doze, from which he was suddenly awakened by a grinding roar as of subterranean thunder, followed by the crash of falling timber, while his bed rocked violently beneath him, and a large picture on the wall facing him was dashed to the ground.

Geoff scrambled up and hastily dressed himself. It was not the first time he had been in an earthquake; indeed, at this epoch of his life, few experiences were new to Geoffrey Pierrepoint. With a self-engrossment excusable under the circumstances, he made his way downstairs through an excited crowd of frightened people in every variety of déshabille, some shrieking, some fainting, some clinging to their male protectors, some asking advice—none taking it—to the first floor. Along wrecked corridors, strewn with a litter of plaister from walls and ceiling, past open doors and empty rooms, Pierrepoint sped on towards the West Wing, till hurriedly turning the last corner he stopped short. Here the flooring had given way altogether, and an impassable chasm lay between him and the closed doors opposite. He shouted loudly with a vague idea of attracting the occupants' attention, yet of what use while that fearful gulf lay between them and safety! His aunt's rooms and those occupied by Mrs. Beaudesert lay far away from those of the other visitors. They were in peril together and alone, and who could say how soon the sullen mutterings of the unquiet earth might again break out in open anger and complete the ruin already begun?

A sick feeling of despair came over Geoff as he dashed downstairs and on to the terrace, the ground rocking beneath him as he ran. In a few minutes he stood beneath the windows of the West Wing; many of them were open. He shouted with all his might, calling on his friends by name.

"Yes, we are here," was the answer, as a familiar figure came and leaned over the heliotrope-wreathed balcony, clasping her hands in thankfulness. "It is you! Ah! thank heaven! But retreat is cut off, and I was afraid we should be left to die up here."

"Is Lady Lucy with you?"

"Yes; lying down in my room, faint and ill with the shock."

"I will get a ladder at once. Will you look up some wraps, and any small valuables while I am gone? Keep a good heart, Mrs. Beaudesert, I will not be long."

She smiled back at him reassuringly, and Geoff hurried off. He afterwards came to consider it quite providential that the day before he had happened to notice some houses under repair near the Post-office. The Post-office itself was now in ruins, the scaffolding and great part of the houses also, but the ladders remained. With the help of an hotel porter, he managed to drag one out of the débris,

and together they carried it quickly to the Millefleurs, through the obstructions of the crowded streets. One or two priests going about among their flock were urging escape to the mountains, others were hurrying to the shore. On the earth this terrible Ash Wednesday were terror, and mourning, and woe, but in the heavens the pitiless sun still kept smiling carnival.

When Colonel Pierrepoint reached the Millefleurs, Mrs. Beaudesert was looking out for him. He caught sight of her pale face above the heliotrope blossoms, and was reassured. She was so far safe then.

The ladder was placed and held by the porter, Pierre, and in a minute Geoff was on the balcony. "At last!" he said, under his breath.

Mrs. Beaudesert was wonderfully calm. She had put on her hat and travelling cloak, and collected some wraps which she flung down to Pierre. Geoffrey went up to her. "Come!" he said; "Pierre will hold the ladder."

But Mrs. Beaudesert waved him aside. "No," she said gently; "Lady Lucy first. She is all ready in her walking-things, but dreadfully alarmed."

"I'll go to her, but let me see you in safety first; it will take but a few minutes!"

The resolute look on her face was not to be mistaken.

"All in good time," she said firmly. "Come, don't let us waste precious minutes."

He dared say no more, and she led the way to where Lady Lucy was waiting, a smelling bottle in one hand, and her fat pug, Toby, held tightly in the other. She was trembling and helpless as a baby, and between them they had much ado to soothe and reassure her before she would trust herself to the ladder even in Geoffrey's care. Then there was Toby, always an embarrassment even in happier moments. But Mrs. Beaudesert promised to take faithful care of him, and at last, gently persistent, succeeded in withdrawing the frightened animal from its mistress's clasp, Lady Lucy protesting all the while that nothing should induce her to desert her darling.

In five minutes more, though it seemed an age to her nephew's impatience, Lady Lucy, still sobbing and protesting, was deposited in the garden at a safe distance from the house. Geoff only waited to drop a fur cloak about her shivering form, and then hurried back to Mrs. Beaudesert in the perilous West Wing. She was beguiling the time by gathering together a few treasures which she was loth to leave behind her.

Toby trembled violently and gave a series of short, sharp barks, ending in a piteous howl. At the same moment came a grating, deafening roar, the whole house seemed to rock violently from side to side, the heavy stone mantelpiece tottered slowly forward, and the ornaments upon it fell with a crash and were shattered into fragments.

Mrs. Beaudesert turned deadly pale, but she neither screamed nor fainted. She and Geoff stood speechless, facing each other with wide-dilated eyes. All at once, while the room still vibrated violently, and the church bells rang an alarm of fear in the rocking steeples, there came the sound of a loosening of stones, a grating and grinding close at hand, followed by an awful crash. It seemed as though the very foundation of the earth were loosened. Mrs. Beaudesert put out her hands to Pierrepoint with a startled cry: "*Geoffrey!*"

The word was breathed almost in a whisper, but he caught it. And in that awful moment Geoffrey Pierrepoint understood that the desire of his heart was granted him at last. If this were, indeed, death, its bitterness was sweetened for him as he dared to gather the trembling form of his beloved into his protecting arms, and felt the proud head nestling content upon his shoulder, while together they waited—waited—waited—for destruction!

A shout presently aroused the pair in rather a prosaic manner.

It was Pierre, who having wisely fled during the tremblement de terre had now ventured cautiously back to his post. The actual damage, it seemed, was not so great after all. The main fabric of the Hotel had resisted the shock and still stood firm, and the ladder, though thrown to the ground, was luckily uninjured.

Geoffrey only waited to test it with his own weight, and then hastened his companion's escape to the garden below. She had passively resigned herself to his care and, though trembling in every limb, suppressed her fears and obeyed his directions in silence, not uttering a word, even of thanks, until she found herself safe beside Lady Lucy, beyond the reach of falling stones and tottering floors.

None of them ever quite knew how the next hour passed. Una Beaudesert has hazy recollections of Geoffrey forcing refreshments upon them as they sat there, dizzy, chilled and trembling, in the keen morning air, amid a medley of dreadful scenes and sounds which long haunted her dreams. Hysterical, half-dressed people cowering together in groups; frightened pet animals running hither and thither; gasping invalids lying about on mattresses; others, bruised or injured, borne away moaning to the hospitals; but amidst it all the comfortable thought that Geoff was taking care of them—thinking and planning for them. Una had a new restful sense of sharing Lady Lucy's blind confidence in her nephew's wisdom, and instinctively they both gave themselves up to his guidance without question or argument.

And so a little later the trio found themselves on their way to the shore to seek the friendly shelter of Sir Fergus Farquharson's yacht, which Geoff had secured for them. The quay was strewn with litter of every description: valuables, wearing-apparel, half-packed portmanteaux; and among them some few fortunate fugitives were like themselves hurrying to find that safety on the water which the yawning earth denied them.

Colonel Pierrepoint was supporting his aunt's trembling footsteps as she clung to him in nervous terror, almost hysterical with alarm. It was not until they were safely in the boat, receding farther and farther with every oar-stroke from the perils of the shore, that Geoff again found himself beside Mrs. Beaudesert. She sat with her head resting on her hand gazing on the ruin they had left behind them; the Cathedral with its fallen cupola, the tottering walls and chimneys of the old town, the beautiful, wrecked façade of the Millefleurs where they had lately lodged in security. She shivered as a sickening sense came over her of the danger they had escaped. Geoff, watching her anxiously, hastened to wrap a light travelling shawl about her, fancying she was cold: he was always more apt at deeds than words.

She turned to him gratefully. "You are very good. I have never thanked you properly yet."

"There is no need," he answered simply. "That one word was enough for me. Did you mean all it expressed?"

He was bending over her tenderly, eager to be assured of his good fortune. "It seems somehow almost too good to be true, and I wouldn't for the world hold you to it if you repent."

A beautiful colour flushed her wan face. Geoff for his part could hear his heart-beats as he laid his hand wistfully upon her arm.

"Tell me, Una, *did* you mean it?"

She looked up, and her earnest hazel eyes met his frankly with a suspicion of mischief lurking in their depths.

"Mean what, Geoffrey? That the time you spoke of has come? Yes; though you should never have known it except for the earthquake. And, by-the-bye," archly, "what about Lady Lucy? You remember she quite disapproved of poor Roy's choice."

"True, dear; but I know she'll find room in her heart for 'Roy's Good Samaritan.'"

A NIECE FOR AN AUNT.

"COME away from the window, Justina!"

Aunt Blanche gave this command pretty frequently, but Justina (Tina as she would have called herself) always forgot. Not very much passed the window, truly, for Elm Cottage stood off the high road, but every half-hour or so something did come along the lane, and the sound of wheels always brought Tina to the window.

Aunt Blanche sat all day writing at her large table, and had not much time to spare for her niece; but she was immaculately ladylike, and, in her code, it was not ladylike to look out of the window, so whenever she raised her eyes and saw Justina standing there, she always called her back. Then Tina would return, blushing to the roots of her hair, and sit down again at her own little low table, where she kept her workbox and portfolio, and her little library, and the photographs of her two dearest friends in frames, and a rosebud in a tall thin vase.

She used to sit there half the day, scribbling letters to her old schoolfellows, and making little mattress pincushions and fancy housewives, but she was not very happy, and the time hung heavily on her hands. True, she had the run of Aunt Blanche's bookshelves, but unfortunately she did not care for reading, and the piano, which she would have enjoyed, was denied to her; for Aunt Blanche might not be disturbed.

Of course Aunt Blanche meant to be very kind. But she did not understand the requirements of sweet seventeen. She was happy enough, writing, writing all day long. But little Tina wanted something more—fresh air, exercise, young companions, music, gaiety—and this never occurred to Aunt Blanche.

But an eventful day came. One morning dawned gloomy and black, as summer days sometimes will, and at ten o'clock the rain was pouring down with all the violence possible. It was Friday, and Aunt Blanche, who was a rigid churchwoman, walked two miles every Wednesday and Friday to the nearest church. The rain did not make her forego her Litany; she did not care for weather. But she decreed that it was no fit day for Justina to venture forth, and Justina accordingly stayed at home, sighing a little because she liked seeing the curate, who was unmarried and only one-and-thirty, but rather glad also, because she did not like the clerical gentleman (who was hardly aware of her existence) to see her in dirty boots and an old hat.

So she buttoned up Aunt Blanche's long waterproof cloak and helped her to put on her goloshes and opened her umbrella and shut

the door after her with mixed feelings. Then she furtively watched Aunt Blanche out of sight, and, breathing more freely, stationed herself at the window. True, nothing was likely to pass on such a day as this, but there was occupation in gazing into the lane, and Tina was so tired of sitting at her horrid little table. So she watched the rain-drops pattering down into the puddles, and counted the roses hanging their heavy heads on the bush opposite, and wished Lucetta Robinson and Mimi Vaughan were there, and wondered if Aunt Blanche would let her be Mimi's bridesmaid, *if* Mimi married her cousin Tom when he came back from sea.

Then—hark! Surely that was the sound of wheels, and surely—as Tina strained her eyes in the direction whence the sound proceeded—surely that was the station-fly coming lumbering along. If it was in a novel, thought silly little Tina, the fly would stop at Elm Cottage; and while she was thinking so, the fly actually did stop, and (what was still more like a novel) out of it sprang a man, and a young man, too—much younger than the curate, perhaps not more than twenty-five.

Tina flew back to her table and seized her pen. "My own darling Mimi,—What *do* you think?" she began to write. Then old Betty opened the door and announced, "A gentleman wishes to see you, miss—Mr. Charles Ward," and in walked a tall, big stranger, with a roll of papers in his hand.

"I must beg you to pardon my intrusion," began Charles Ward, apologetically.

But silly little Tina stopped him immediately.

"Oh, it's no matter—it doesn't signify," she murmured.

Charles Ward looked at her with rather a puzzled air. How very young this authoress looked! He imagined she had been writing these twenty years, but no doubt he was mistaken.

"I believe I am addressing Miss Rivers?" he said.

"Yes, yes," replied Tina. "Yes—that is to say, I—my aunt ——"

She paused. She had just succeeded in getting rid of her colour, but now it came back as rosily as ever.

"I came to ask your permission to publish one of your songs, which I have set to music," said Charles Ward.

"Oh!" said Tina, full of wonder.

One of her songs! Was the man mad? She instinctively grasped her pen tighter, and Charles Ward of course imagined that she was in the act of composing, and thought how eccentric literary ladies were, and yet how pretty and attractive this particular literary lady was.

"Directly I read your song, I fell in love with it," he began to explain; I set it to music, and now I have a great desire to publish it. I am a musician," he went on, as Tina made no remark, "the organist of Stanley Cathedral, and as I was passing—I ought to have written—but I thought——"

He stopped, stammering. He could not precisely say that curiosity to see a literary lion who lived a perfectly secluded life had brought him hither.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Tina again.

"But have I your permission to publish the song?" asked Ward.

He admired Miss Rivers very much, but, after all, he had gathered nothing tangible from his visit.

"Yes, yes," said Tina hurriedly. "I mean—if my aunt—I'll ask—I can't say."

She almost began to wish that all men were curates, always in church, where one can see them without having to talk.

"Perhaps I might try it over and see if you approve," suggested the stranger, whose keen eyes had long ago detected the piano. "If you are fond of music," he added dubiously.

Tina dropped her pen and clasped her little hands.

"There is nothing in the world I love like music," cried she. "And I never hear any now!"

"Then may I sing this to you?" said Ward.

He went to the piano, and Tina followed him. The instrument looked very old and the keys were yellow.

"I'm afraid it's not a very good one, and I should think it was out of tune," said Tina.

She leaned forward and struck a chord or two. But the sound was not particularly displeasing, and Ward quickly seated himself, opened the roll of paper in his hand, played the opening bars, and began singing. Tina listened, entranced. When the song came to an end, she cried, "Thank you, thank you," but she gave no permission for the song to be published, and Charles Ward, who was beginning to be much impressed both with her beauty and her oddity, begged her to try the song herself.

"No doubt you can read music, and this is a soprano song," he said. "Yours is a soprano voice, surely?"

Tina demurred a little. She was out of practice, she said; had not opened her lips for weeks, was not quite sure that she had not a little cold. But she was presently induced to try. Ward played the opening bars again, and Tina, more at her ease vocally than conversationally, began to sing.

She had just sung the last note and Ward was still playing a few chords, when the door suddenly opened and Aunt Blanche stood before them, her dripping umbrella in her hand and a look of intense surprise upon her face. Aunt Blanche had once been a handsome woman, but her complexion had become coarse and her features sharp, and Charles Ward thought her positively hideous as she stood there confronting him, wet, splashed with mud, and frowning. This was the duenna of the place, he perceived —the tyrant who kept the lovely young scribe shut up in close seclusion: horrible, gaunt, grim gorgon, in her goloshes and her straight, soaked cloak!

"Justina!" cried Aunt Blanche.

But Tina, completely terrified, had sought refuge behind the stalwart form of the musician, and stood there shivering but invisible. Aunt Blanche, however, knew that she was there.

"Justina," she demanded, "have you and this gentleman ever met before?"

Tina could not reply; she was on the verge of tears. Charles Ward looked over his shoulder at her, and immediately took her part as became a man.

"No, madam, we have never met before," he said. "I ventured to call on Miss Rivers to ask permission to publish one of her songs."

Aunt Blanche looked hard at him; she was amazed, confounded. What deceit, what hypocrisy was this? For the first time in her life she made use of an emphatically unladylike expression.

"Gracious heavens, what next?" she exclaimed. "Pray, sir, were you not my niece's music-master at school?"

Charles Ward drew himself up and looked very angry.

"Madam," he replied haughtily, "I have given you my word once, and you will excuse me if I decline to make any further explanation. My business," he added, with great emphasis, "is with *Miss Rivers.*"

"Then pray may I ask why you don't address yourself to Miss Rivers?" inquired Aunt Blanche.

She was beginning to comprehend the situation, and the twinkle in her eye showed that she could sometimes recall the time when she published her volume of "Songs of Love and Humour."

"I have been doing so," said the stranger. "Miss Rivers was doing me the honour of singing the song I have composed to her words, and I was in hopes of obtaining her leave ——"

But this was more than Aunt Blanche could stand. "Leave!" she cried. "Leave! Justina, what does all this mean? Come forward at once, child, and explain yourself."

But to tell Tina to explain herself—silly little Tina, who had never been able to explain clearly what an island was, or how Charles I. came to his death—was as futile as if Aunt Blanche had desired the sun to shine through a fog. The poor child came a step forward, and then burst into tears and covered her face with her little trembling hands. Aunt Blanche looked at her, and then at the stranger, and Ward looked at the pretty, shrinking form at his side, and then at the drenched and ugly woman before him. Then he saw the twinkle in Aunt Blanche's eye, and a glimmer of the truth began to dawn upon him.

"I am afraid there is some mistake," he said, gravely.

"I am afraid it is a case of mistaken identity," returned Aunt Blanche.

"Are *you* Miss Rivers? Did *you* write the song?" asked Ward.

"Show me the song in question and I'll tell you," said Aunt

Blanche. "I did indeed write a book called 'Songs of Love and Humour,' but my niece may have written the song you speak of. Pray show it to me."

Tina began to cry again, withered by her aunt's sarcasm, but Aunt Blanche was not unkind at heart. The song was hers, undeniably, and she readily gave Ward the permission he had come to seek. Then he took his leave; there was no other course for him to pursue. Aunt Blanche gave him her hand frankly.

"If you are ever passing again and like to look in," she said, "we shall be glad to see you. You will know then which of us is which."

So he departed, and Tina heaved a sigh.

"Why do you sigh, child?" said Aunt Blanche. "Why don't you help me off with my cloak instead? Dear, dear! my umbrella has made a pool on the carpet, and the young man has left his music behind him, I declare! Well, cheer up, Justina! I haven't the smallest doubt that he will return—for his music."

"I wish he would! It was so like a novel while he was here," thought Tina, as she carried away her aunt's dripping possessions; and she began to frame all manner of grand speeches which she would make to him, if he did, explanatory of her strange behaviour during their first interview. But she made none of them, although Charles Ward did return the very next day—for his music—and went on returning pretty often all through the autumn. There was never any convenient season for Tina's set speeches, and when she wrote her Christmas letter to her darling Mimi, she was obliged to confess, "I've never, *never* told him the whole story yet!"

"Yes, yes," Aunt Blanche was saying to the musician at that very moment. "Tina is a little goose, but she is a sweet child, and—and—God bless you both!"

And then a queer expression came over Aunt Blanche's face and she looked like a wintry sunset, and Charles Ward (who was a sensible young man in the main) actually kissed her. For elderly people, you know, even when their complexions have become coarse and their features sharp, have hearts packed snugly away behind their common sense and knowledge of the world; and Ward had found out Aunt Blanche's heart, and when he had found it out, he ceased to think her ugly or a gorgon.

But did he stop short at kissing the aunt?

I have reason to believe not. For, in the spring, I heard that Tina was married and that her new surname began with a W.

FAYR MADOC.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

The house is all silent, no murmur is there,
Save the tick of the clock from its niche on the stair,
And the sob of a mourner, half hush'd into prayer.

And silent and still is that wonderful room,
Where the lilies are shedding their subtle perfume—
The white summer lilies that shine thro' the gloom.

The roses blush faint on the flower-strewn bed,
The candles are burning at foot and at head,
Lest the spirits of darkness should trouble the dead.

Thro' the vine-covered lattice the harvest moon shines,
And the shadows have woven in delicate lines
On the floor of the chamber a tracing of vines.

The spirit of stillness broods over the place,
Where the angel of death has uncovered his face,
And folded his wings to abide for a space.

Through the shadowy valley he pointed the goal,
One stroke of his sword broke I ife's beautiful bowl,
And severed the link that bound body and soul.

The weary lids dropt o'er the pain-haunted eyes,
The labour'd breath sank into quivering sighs,
One sharp bitter struggle, and Death won his prize.

Now hope is all over, now longing is still,
Naught left but the sorrow too bitter to kill,
And the break in the circle that nothing can fill.

To-day one of us—gone whither to-night?
Our straining eyes saw not the soul in its flight,
For the gloom of the valley had blinded our sight.

What mighty experience, awful and strange,
What rapture, what fulness have entered the range
Of the soul that has passed through the mystical change?

What realised vision entrances the eyes
That have looked their last look on Humanity's skies,
And seen the first dawning on Heaven's sunrise?

No answer comes back to our questioning sore,
We but stand by the sea, he has crossed to the shore—
And the place that beheld him shall know him no more.

No place any more in this world of unrest—
But look on the face that the angel hath bless'd,
Who can ask whether living or dying is best?

Oh! fair shines the chamber transfigured in light,
And fair is that silent face, peaceful and white;
The day has been heavy, but calm is the night.

The last word is spoken, the last prayer is said,
From the house of its bondage the Spirit has fled;
Behold, it is written, Thrice blest are the Dead.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE WATCH.

MR. SERGEANT STILLINGFAR sat at dinner in his house in Russell Square one Sunday afternoon. A great cause, in which he was to lead, had brought him up from circuit, to which he would return when the Nisi Prius trial was over. The cloth was being removed when I entered. He received me with his usual kindly welcome.

"Why not have come to dinner, Charles? Just had it, you say? All the more reason why we might have had it together. Sit down, and help yourself to wine."

Declining the wine, I drew my chair near his and told him what I had come about.

A few days had gone on since the last chapter. What with the trouble connected with Mrs. Brightman, and the trouble connected with Tom Heriot, I had enough on my mind at that time, if not upon my shoulders. As regarded Mrs. Brightman, no one could help me; but regarding the other ——

Was Tom in London, or was he not? How was I to find out? I had again gone prowling about the book-stall and its environs, and had seen no trace of him. Had Leah really seen him, or only some other man who resembled him?

Again I questioned Leah. Her opinion was not to be shaken. She held emphatically to her assertion. It was Tom that she had seen and none other.

"You may have seen some other sailor, sir; I don't say to the contrary; but the sailor I saw was Captain Heriot," she reiterated. "Suppose I go again to-night, sir? I may perhaps have the good luck to see him."

"Should you call it good luck, Leah?"

"Ah, well, sir, you know what I mean," she answered. "Shall I go to-night?"

"No, Leah; I am going myself. I cannot rest in this uncertainty."

Rest! I felt more like a troubled spirit or a wandering ghost. Arthur Lake asked what it was that ailed me, and where I disappeared to of an evening.

Once more I turned out in the discarded clothes to saunter about Lambeth. It was Saturday night, and the thoroughfares were crowded; but amidst all who came and went, I saw no trace of Tom.

Worried, disheartened, I determined to carry the perplexity to my Uncle Stillingfar. That he was true as steel, full of loving kindness to all the world, no matter what their errors, and that he would aid me with his counsel—if any counsel could avail—I well knew. And thus I found myself at his house on that Sunday afternoon. Of course he had heard about the escape of the convicts; had seen Tom's name in the list; but he did not know that he was suspected of having reached London. I told him of what Leah had seen, and added the little episode about "Miss Betsy."

"And now, what can be done, Uncle Stillingfar? I have come to ask you."

His kindly blue eyes became thoughtful whilst he pondered the question. "Indeed, Charles, I know not," he answered. "Either you must wait in patience until he turns up some fine day—as he is sure to do if he is in London—or you must quietly pursue your search for him, and smuggle him away when you have found him."

"But if I don't find him? Do you think it could be Tom that Leah saw? Is it possible that he can be in London?"

"Quite possible. If a homeward vessel, bound it may be for the port of London, picked them up, what more likely than that he is here? Again, who else would call himself Charles Strange, and pass himself off for you? Though I cannot see his motive for doing it."

"Did you ever know any man so recklessly imprudent, uncle?"

"I have never known any man so reckless as Tom Heriot. You must do your best to find him, Charles."

"I don't know how. I thought you might possibly have suggested some plan. Every passing day increases his danger."

"It does: and the chances of his being recognised."

"It seems useless to search further in Lambeth: he must have changed his quarters. And to look about London for him will be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. I suppose," I slowly added, "it would not do to employ a detective?"

"Not unless you wish to put him into the lion's mouth," said the Sergeant. "Why, Charles, it would be his business to re-take him. Rely upon it, the police are now looking for him if they have the slightest suspicion that he is here."

At that time one or two private detectives had started in business on their own account, having nothing to do with the police: now they have sprung up in numbers. It was to these I alluded.

Sergeant Stillingfar shook his head. "I would not trust one of them, Charles: it would be too dangerous an experiment. No; what you do, you must do yourself. Once let Government get scent that he is here, and we shall probably find the walls placarded with a reward for his apprehension."

"One thing I am surprised at," I said as I rose to leave: "that if he is here, he should not have let me know it. What can he be doing for money? An escaped convict is not likely to have much of that about him."

Sergeant Stillingfar shook his head. "There are points about the affair that I cannot fathom, Charles. Talking of money—you are well off now, but if more than you can spare should be needed to get Tom Heriot away, apply to me."

"Thank you, uncle; but I don't think it will be needed. Where would you recommend him to escape to?"

"Find him first," was the Sergeant's answer.

He accompanied me himself to the front door. As we stood, speaking a last word, a middle-aged man, with keen eyes and spare frame, dressed as a workman, came up with a brisk step. Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar met the smile on the man's face as he glanced up in passing.

"Arkwright!" he exclaimed. "I hardly knew you. Some sharp case in hand, I conclude?"

"Just so, Sergeant; but I hope to bring it to earth before the day's over. You know ——"

But there the man, glancing at me, came to a pause.

"However, I mustn't talk about it now, so good afternoon, Sergeant." And thus speaking, he walked briskly onwards.

"I wonder what he has in hand? I think he would have told me, Charles, but for your being present," cried my uncle, looking after him. "A keen man is Arkwright."

"*Arkwright!*" I echoed, the name now impressing itself upon me. "Surely not Arkwright the renowned detective!"

"Yes, it is. And he has evidently got himself up as a workman in furtherance of the case he has in hand. He knew you, Charles; depend upon that; though you did not know him."

A fear, perhaps a foolish one, fell upon me. "Uncle Stillingfar," I breathed, "can his case be *Tom's?* Think you it is he who is being run to earth?"

"No, no. I do not think that likely," he answered, after a moment's consideration. "Anyway, you must use every exertion to find him, for his stay in London is full of danger."

It will be readily believed that this incident had not added to my peace of mind. One more visit I decided to pay to the old ground at Lambeth, and after that—why, in truth, whether to turn east, west, north or south, I knew no more than the dead.

Monday was bright and frosty; Monday evening clear, cold, and

starlight. The gas-lights flared away in the streets and shops, the roads were lined with wayfarers.

Sauntering down the narrow pavement on the opposite side of the way, in the purposeless manner that a hopeless man favours, I approached the book-stall. A sailor was standing before it, his head bent over the wares. Every pulse within me went up to fever heat: for there was that in him that reminded me of Tom Heriot.

I crossed quietly to the stall, stood side by side with him, and took up a handful of penny dreadfuls. Yes, it was he—Tom Heriot.

"Tom," I cried softly. "Tom!"

I felt the start he gave. But he did not move hand or foot; only his eyes turned to scan me.

"Tom," I whispered again, apparently intent upon a grand picture of a castle in flames, and a gentleman miraculously escaping with a lady from an attic window. "Tom, don't you know me?"

"For goodness' sake don't speak to me, old man!" he breathed in answer, the words barely audible. "Go away, for the love of heaven! I've been a prisoner here for the last three minutes. That policeman yonder would know me, and I dare not turn. His name's Wren."

Three doors off, a policeman was standing at the edge of the pavement, facing the shops, as if waiting to pounce upon someone he was expecting to pass. Even as Tom spoke, he wheeled round to the right, and marched up the street. Tom as quickly disappeared to the left, leaving a few words in my ear.

"I'll wait for you at the other end, Charley; it is darker there than here. Don't follow me immediately."

So I remained where I was, still bending an enraptured gaze upon the burning castle and the gallant knight and damsel escaping from it at their peril.

"Betsy says the account comes to seven shillings, Mr. Strange."

The address gave me nearly as great a thrill as the sight of Tom had done. It came from the man, Lee, now emerging from his shop. Involuntarily I pulled my hat lower upon my brow. He looked up the street and down it.

"Oh, I beg pardon—thought Mr. Strange was standing here," he said. And then I saw the error I had made. It was not to me he spoke, but to Tom Heriot. My gaze was still fascinated by the flaming picture.

"Anything you'd like this evening, sir?"

"I'll take this sheet—half a dozen of them," I said, putting down sixpence.

"Thank you, sir. A fine night."

"Yes, very. Were you speaking to the sailor who stood here?" I added, carelessly. "He went off in that direction, I think," pointing to the opposite one Tom had taken.

"Yes, answered the man; "'twas Mr. Strange. He had asked

me to look how much his score was for tobacco. I daresay he'll be back presently. Captain Strange, by rights," added Lee, chattily.

"Oh! Captain of a vessel?"

"Of his own vessel; a yacht. Not but what he have been about the world in vessels of all sorts, he tells us; one voyage afore the mast, the next right up next to the skipper. But for them ups and downs where, as he says, would sailors find their experience?"

"Very true. Well, this is all I want just now. Good evening."

"Good evening, sir," replied Caleb Lee.

The end of the street, to which Tom had pointed, was destitute of shops; the houses were small and poor; consequently, it was tolerably dark. Tom was sauntering along, smoking a short pipe.

"Is there any place at hand where we can have a few words together in tolerable security?" I asked.

"Come along," briefly responded Tom. "You walk on the other side of the street, old fellow; keep me in view."

It was good advice, and I took it. He increased his pace to a brisk walk, and presently turned down a narrow passage, which brought him to a sort of small, triangular green, planted with shrubs and trees. I followed, and we sat down on one of the benches.

"Are you quite mad, Tom?"

"Not mad a bit," laughed Tom. "I say, Charley, did you come to that book-stall to look after me?"

"Ay. And it's about the tenth time I have been there."

"How the dickens did you find me out?"

"Chance one evening took Leah into the neighbourhood, and she happened to see you. I had feared you might be in England."

"You had heard of the wreck of the *Vengeance*, I suppose; and that a few of us had escaped. Good old Leah! Did I give her a fright?"

We were sitting side by side. Tom had put his pipe out, lest the light should catch the sight of any passing stragglers. We spoke in whispers. It was, perhaps, as safe a place as could be found; nevertheless, I sat upon thorns.

Not so Tom. By the few signs that might be gathered—his light voice, his gay laugh, his careless manner—Tom felt as happy and secure as if he had been attending one of Her Majesty's levées, in the full glory of scarlet coat and flashing sword blade.

"Do you know, Tom, you have half-killed me with terror and apprehension? How could you be so reckless as to come back to London?"

"Because the old ship brought me," lightly returned Tom.

"I suppose a vessel picked you up—and the comrades who escaped with you?"

"It picked two of us up. The other three died."

"What, in the boat?"

He nodded. "In the open boat at sea."

"How did you manage to escape? I thought convicts were too well looked after."

"So they are, under ordinary circumstances; shipwrecks form the exception. I'll give you the history, Charley."

"Make it brief, then. I am upon thorns."

Tom laughed, and began.

"We were started on that blessed voyage, a cargo of men in irons, and for some time made a fair passage, and thought we must be nearing the other side. Such a crew, that cargo, Charles! Such an awful lot! Villainous wretches, who wore their guilt on their faces, and suffered their deserts; half demons, most of them. A few amongst them were no doubt like me, innocent enough; wrongfully accused and condemned ——"

"But go on with the narrative now, Tom."

"I swear I was innocent," he cried, with emotion, heedless of my interruption. "I was wickedly careless, I admit that, but the guilt was another's, not mine. When I put those bills into circulation, Charles, I knew no more that they were forged than you did. Don't you believe me?"

"I do believe you. I have believed you throughout."

"And if the trial had not been hurried on I think it could have been proved. It was hurried on, Charles, and when it was on it was hurried over. I am suffering unjustly."

"Yes, Tom. But won't you go on with your story?"

"Where was I? Oh, about the voyage and the shipwreck. After getting out of the south-east trades, we had a fortnight's light winds and calms, and then got into a steady westerly wind, before which we ran quietly for some days. One dark night, it was the fifteenth of November, and thick, drizzling weather, the wind about north-west, we had turned-in and were in our first sleep, when a tremendous uproar arose on deck; the watch shouting and tramping, the officers' orders and the boatswain's mate's shrill piping rising above the din. One might have thought Old Nick had leaped aboard and was giving chase. Next came distinctly that fearful cry, 'All hands save ship!' Sails were being clewed up, yards were being swung round. Before we could realise what it all meant, the ship had run ashore; and there she stuck, bumping as if she would knock her bottom out."

"Get on, Tom," I whispered, for he had paused, and seemed to be spinning a long yarn instead of a short one.

"Fortunately, the ship soon made a sort of cradle for herself in the sand and lay on her starboard bilge. To attempt to get her off was hopeless. So they got us all out of the ship and on shore, and put us under tents made of the sails. The skipper made out, or thought he made out, the island to be that of Tristan d'Acunha: whether it was or not I can't say positively. At first we thought it was uninhabited, but it turned out to have a few natives on it, sixty

or eighty in all. In the course of a few days every movable thing had been landed. All the boats were intact, and were moored in a sort of creek, or small natural harbour, their gear, sails and oars in them."

"Hush!" I warningly breathed, "or you are lost!"

A policeman's bull's-eye was suddenly turned upon the grass. By the man's size, I knew him for Tom's friend, Wren. We sat motionless. The light just escaped us, and the man passed on. But we had been in danger.

"If you would only be quicker, Tom! I don't want to know about boats and their gear."

He laughed. "How impatient you are, Charles! Well, to get on ahead. A cargo of convicts cannot be kept as securely under such circumstances as had befallen us as they could be in a ship's hold, and the surveillance exercised was surprisingly lax. Two or three of the prisoners were meditating an escape, and thought they saw their way to effecting it by means of one of the boats. I found this out, and joined the party. But there were almost insurmountable difficulties in the way. It was absolutely necessary that we should put on ordinary clothes—for what vessel, picking us up, but would have delivered us up at the first port it touched at had we been in convict dress? We marked the purser's slop-chest, which was under a tent, and well-filled, and——"

"Do get on, Tom!"

"Here goes, then! One calm, but dark night, when other people were sleeping, we stole down to the creek, five of us, rigged ourselves out in the pursur's toggery, leaving the Government uniforms in exchange, unmoored one of the cutters, and got quietly away. We had secreted some bread and salt meat; water there had been already on board. The wind was off the land, and we let the boat drift before it a bit before attempting to make sail. By daylight we were far enough from the island; no chance of their seeing us—a speck on the waters. The wind, hitherto south, had backed to the westward. We shaped a course by the sun to the eastward, and sailed along at the rate of five or six knots. My comrades were not as rough as they might have been, Charley; rather decent fellows for convicts. Two of them were from Essex; had been sentenced for poaching only. Now began our look-out: constantly straining our eyes along the horizon for a sail, but especially astern for an outward-bounder, but only saw one or two in the distance that did not see us. What I underwent in that boat as day after day passed and no sail appeared, I won't enter upon now, old fellow. The provisions were exhausted, and so was the water. One by one three of my companions went crazy and died. The survivor and I had consigned the last of them to the deep on the twelfth day, and then I thought my turn had come; but Markham was worse than I was. How many hours went on, I knew not. I lay at the bottom of the boat,

exhausted and half unconscious, when suddenly I heard voices. I imagined it to be a dream. But in a few minutes a boat was alongside the cutter, and two of its crew had stepped over and were raising me up. They spoke to me, but I was too weak to understand or answer; in fact, I was delirious. I and Markham were taken on board and put to bed. After some days, passed in a sort of dreamy, happy delirium, well cared for and attended to, I woke up to the realities of life. Markham was dead: he had never revived, and died of exposure and weakness some hours after the rescue."

"What vessel had picked you up?"

"It was the *Discovery*, a whaler belonging to Whitby, and homeward bound. The Captain, Van Hoppe, was Dutch by birth, but had been reared in England and had always sailed in English ships. A good and kind fellow, if ever there was one. Of course, I had to make my tale good, and suppress the truth. The passenger-ship in which I was sailing to Australia to seek my fortune had foundered in mid-ocean, and those who escaped with me had died of their sufferings. That was true so far. Captain Van Hoppe took up my misfortunes warmly. Had he been my own brother—had he been *you*, Charley—he could not have treated me better or cared for me more. The bark had a prosperous run home. She was bound for the port of London; and when I put my hand into Van Hoppe's at parting, and tried to thank him for his goodness, he left a twenty-pound note in it. 'You'll need it, Mr. Strange,' he said; 'you can repay me when your fortune's made and you are rich.'"

"*Strange!*" I cried.

Tom laughed.

"I called myself 'Strange' on the whaler. Don't know that it was wise of me. One day when I was getting better and lay deep in thought—which just then chanced to be of you, Charley—the mate suddenly asked me what my name was. 'Strange,' I answered, on the spur of the moment. That's how it was. And that's the brief history of my escape."

"You have had money, then, for your wants since you landed," I remarked.

"I have had the twenty pounds. It's coming to an end now."

"You ought not to have come to London. You should have got the captain to put you ashore somewhere, and then made your escape from England."

"All very fine to talk, Charley! I had not a sixpence in my pocket, or any idea that he was going to help me. I could only come on as far as the bark would bring me."

"And suppose he had not given you money—what then?"

"Then I must have contrived to let you know that I was home again, and borrowed from you," he lightly replied.

"Well, your being here is frightfully dangerous."

"Not a bit of it. As long as the police don't suspect I am in

England, they won't look after me. It's true that a few of them might know me, but I do not think they would in this guise and with my altered face."

"You were afraid of one to-night."

"Well, *he* is especially one who might know me; and he stood there so long that I began to think he might be watching me. Any way, I've been on shore these three weeks, and nothing has come of it yet."

"What about that young lady named Betsy? Miss Betsy Lee."

Tom threw himself back in a fit of laughter.

"I hear the old fellow went down to Essex Street one night to ascertain whether I lived there! The girl asked me one day where I lived, and I rapped out Essex Street."

"But, Tom, what have you to do with the girl?"

"Nothing; nothing, on my honour. I have often been in the shop, sometimes of an evening. The father has invited me to some grog in the parlour behind it, and I have sat there for an hour chatting with him and the girl. That's all. She is a well-behaved, modest little girl; none better."

"Well, Tom, with one imprudence and another, you stand a fair chance——"

"There, there! Don't preach, Charley. What you call imprudence, I call fun."

"What do you think of doing? To remain on here for ever in this disguise?"

"Couldn't, I expect, if I wanted to. I must soon see about getting away."

"You must get away at once."

"I am not going yet, Charley; take my word for that; and I am as safe in London, I reckon, as I should be elsewhere. Don't say but I may have to clear out of this particular locality. If that burly policeman is going to make a permanent beat of it about here, he might drop upon me some fine evening."

"And you must exchange your sailor's disguise, as you call it, for a better one."

"Perhaps so. That rough old coat you have on, Charley, might not come amiss to me."

"You can have it. Why do you fear that policeman should know you, more than any other?"

"He was present at the trial last August. Was staring me in the face most of the day. His name's Wren."

I sighed.

"Well, Tom, it is getting late; we have sat here as long as is consistent with safety," I said, rising.

He made me sit down again.

"The later the safer, perhaps, Charley. When shall we meet again?"

"Ay; when, and where?"

"Come to-morrow evening to this same spot. It is as good a one as any I know of. I shall remain indoors all day to-morrow. Of course one does not care to run needlessly into danger. Shall you find your way to it?"

"Yes, and will be here; but I shall go now. Do be cautious, Tom. Do you want any money? I have brought some with me."

"Many thanks, old fellow; I've enough to go on with for a day or two. How is Blanche? Did she nearly die of the disgrace?"

"She did not know of it. Does not know it yet."

"No!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, how can it have been kept from her? She does not live in a wood."

"Level has managed it, somehow. She was abroad during the trial, you know. They have chiefly lived there since, Blanche seeing no English newspapers; and of course her acquaintances do not gratuitously speak to her about it. But I don't think it can be kept from her much longer."

"But where does she think I am—all this time?"

"She thinks you are in India with the regiment."

"I suppose *he* was in a fine way over it!"

"Level? Yes—naturally; and is still. He would have saved you, Tom, at any cost."

"As you would, and one or two more good friends; but, you see, I did not know what was coming upon me in time to ask them. It fell upon my head like a thunderbolt. Level is not a bad fellow at bottom."

"He is a downright good one—at least, that's my opinion of him."

We stood, hand locked in hand, at parting. "Where are you staying?" I whispered.

"Not far off. I've a lodging in the neighbourhood—one room."

"Fare you well, then, until to-morrow evening."

"Au revoir, Charley."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TOM HERIOT.

I FOUND my way straight enough the next night to the little green with its trees and shrubs. Tom was there, and was singing to himself one of our boyhood's songs taught us by Leah.

"Young Henry was as brave a youth
As ever graced a martial story;
And Jane was fair as lovely truth:
She sighed for love and he for glory.

"To her his faith he meant to plight,
And told her many a gallant story:
But war, their honest joys to blight,
Called him away from love to glory.

Young Henry met the foe with pride;
Jane followed—fought—ah! hapless story!
In man's attire, by Henry's side,
She died for love and he for glory."

He was still dressed as a sailor, but the pilot-coat was buttoned up high and tight about his throat, and the round glazed hat was worn upon the front of his head instead of the back of it.

"I thought you meant to change these things, Tom," I said as we sat down.

"All in good time," he answered. "Don't quite know yet what costume to adopt. Could one become a negro-melody man, think you, Charley—or a Red Indian juggler with balls and sword-swallowing?"

How light he seemed! how supremely indifferent! Was it real or only assumed. Then he turned suddenly upon me:

"I say, what are you in black for, Charley? For my sins?"

"For Mr. Brightman."

"Mr. Brightman!" he repeated, his tone changing to one of concern. "Is he dead?"

"He died the last week in February. Some weeks ago now. Died quite suddenly."

"Well, well, well!" softly breathed Tom Heriot. "I am very sorry. I did not know it. But how am I likely to know anything of what the past months have brought forth?"

It would serve no purpose to relate the interview of that night in detail. We spent it partly in quarrelling. That is, in differences of opinion. It was impossible to convince Tom of his danger. I told him about the Sunday incident, when detective Arkwright passed the door of Sergeant Stillingfar, and my momentary fear that he might be looking after Tom. He only laughed. "Good old Uncle Stillingfar!" cried he; "give my love to him." And all his conversation was carried on in the same light strain.

"But you must leave Lambeth," I urged. "You said you would do so."

"I said I might. I will, if I see just cause for doing so. Plenty of time yet. I am not *sure*, you know, Charles, that Wren would know me."

"The very fact of your having called yourself 'Strange' ought to take you away from here."

"Well, I suppose that was a bit of a mistake," he acknowledged. "But look here, brother mine, your own fears mislead you. Until it is known that I have made my way home no one will be likely to look after me. Believing me to be at the Antipodes, they won't search London for me."

"They may suspect that you are in London, if they don't actually know it."

"Not they. To begin with, it must be a matter of absolute

uncertainty whether we got picked up at all, after escaping from the Island; but the natural conclusion will be that, if we were, it was by a vessel bound for the colonies: homeward-bound ships do not take that course. Everyone at all acquainted with navigation knows that. I assure you, our being found by the whaler was the merest chance in the world. Be at ease, Charley. I can take care of myself, and I will leave Lambeth if necessary. One of these fine mornings you may get a note from me, telling you I have emigrated to the Isle of Dogs, or some such enticing quarter, and have become 'Mr. Smith.' Meanwhile, we can meet here occasionally."

"I don't like this place, Tom. It must inevitably be attended with more or less danger. Had I not better come to your lodgings?"

"No," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "I am quite sure that we are safe here, and there it's hot and stifling. A dozen families living in the same house. And I shall not tell you where the lodgings are, Charles: you might be swooping down upon me to carry me away as Mephistopheles carried away Dr. Faustus."

After supplying him with money, after a last handshake, whispering a last injunction to be cautious, I left the triangle, and left him within it. The next moment found me face to face with the burly frame and wary glance of Mr. Policeman Wren. He was standing still in the starlight. I walked past him with as much unconcern as I could muster. He turned to look after me for a time, and then continued his beat.

It gave me a scare. What would be the result if Tom met him unexpectedly as I had done? I would have given half I was worth to hover about and ascertain. But I had to go on my way.

"Can you see Lord Level, sir?"

It was the following Saturday afternoon, and I was just starting for Hastings. The week had passed in anxious labour. Business cares for me, more work than I knew how to get through, for Lennard was away ill, and constant mental torment about Tom. I took out my watch before answering Watts.

"Yes, I have five minutes to spare. If that will be enough for his lordship," I added, laughing, as we shook hands: for he had followed Watts into the room.

"You are off somewhere, Charles?"

"Yes, to Hastings. I shall be back again to-morrow night. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing," replied Lord Level. "I came up from Marshdale this morning, and thought I would come round this afternoon to ask whether you have any news."

When Lord Level went to Marshdale on the visit that bore so suspicious an aspect to his wife, he had remained there only one night, returning to London the following day. This week he had

been down again, and stayed rather longer—two days, in fact. Blanche, as I chanced to know, was rebelling over it. Secretly rebelling, for she had not brought herself to accuse him openly.

"News?" I repeated.

"Of Tom Heriot."

Should I tell Lord Level? Perhaps there was no help for it. When he had asked me before I had known nothing positively; now I knew only too much.

"Why I should have it, I know not; but a conviction lies upon me that he has found his way back to London," he continued. "Charles, you look conscious. Do you know anything?"

"You are right. He is here, and I have seen him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lord Level, throwing himself back in his chair. "Has he really been mad enough to come back to London?"

Drawing my own chair nearer to him, I bent forward, and in low tones gave him briefly the history. I had seen Tom on the Monday and Tuesday nights, as already related to the reader. On the Thursday night I was again at the trysting-place, but Tom did not meet me. The previous night, Friday, I had gone again, and again Tom did not appear.

"Is he taken, think you?" cried Lord Level.

"I don't know: and you see I dare not make any inquiries. But I think not. Had he been captured, it would be in the papers."

"I am not so sure of that. What an awful thing! What suspense for us all! Can *nothing* be done?"

"Nothing," I answered, rising, for my time was up. "We can only wait, and watch, and be silent."

"If it were not for the disgrace reflected upon us, and raking it up again to people's minds, I would say let him be re-taken! It would serve him right for his foolhardiness."

"How is Blanche?"

"Cross and snappish; unaccountably so: and showing her temper to me rather unbearably."

I laughed—willing to treat the matter lightly. "She does not care that you should go travelling without her, I take it."

Lord Level, who was passing out before me, turned and gazed into my face.

"Yes," said he emphatically. "But a man may have matters to take up his attention, and his movements also, that he may deem it inexpedient to talk of to his wife."

He spoke with a touch of haughtiness. "Very true," I murmured, as we shook hands and went out together, he walking away towards Gloucester Place, I jumping into the cab waiting to take me to the station.

Mrs. Brightman was better; I knew that; and showing herself more self-controlled. But there was no certainty that the improve-

ment would be lasting. In truth, the certainty lay rather the other way. Her mother's home was no home for Annabel; and I had formed the resolution to ask her to come to mine.

The sun had set when I reached Hastings and Miss Brightman's house. Miss Brightman, who seemed to grow less strong day by day, which I was grieved to hear, was in her room lying down. Annabel sat at the front drawing-room window in the twilight. She started up at my entrance, full of surprise and apprehension.

"Oh, Charles! Has anything happened? Is mamma worse?"

"No, indeed; your mamma is very much better," said I, cheerfully. "I have taken a run down for the pleasure of seeing you, Annabel."

She still looked uneasy. I remembered the dreadful tidings I had brought the last time I came to Hastings. No doubt she was thinking of it, too, poor girl.

"Take a seat, Charles," she said. "Aunt Lucy will soon be down."

I drew a chair opposite to her, and talked for a little time on indifferent topics. The twilight shades grew deeper; passers-by more indistinct, the sea less bright and shimmering. Silence stole over us; a sweet silence, all too conscious, all too fleeting. Annabel suddenly rose, stood at the window, and made some slight remark about a little boat that was nearing the pier.

"Annabel," I whispered, as I rose and stood by her, "you do not know what I have really come down for."

"No," she answered, with hesitation.

"When I last saw you at your own home, you may remember that you were in very great trouble. I asked you to share it with me, but you would not do so."

She began to tremble and became agitated, and I passed my arm round her waist.

"My darling, I now know all."

Her heart beat violently as I held her. Her hand shook nervously in mine.

"You cannot know all!" she cried piteously.

"I know all; more than you do. Mrs. Brightman was worse after you left, and Hatch sent for me. She and Mr. Close have told me the whole truth."

Annabel would have shrunk away, in the full tide of shame that swept over her, and a low moan broke from her lips.

"Nay, my dear, instead of shrinking from me you must come nearer to me—for ever. My home must be yours now."

She did not break away from me, and stood pale and trembling, her hands clasped, her emotion strong.

"It cannot, must not be, Charles."

"Hush, my love. It *can* be—and shall be."

"Charles," she said, her very lips trembling, "weigh well what you

are saying. Do not suffer the—the affection—I must speak fully —the implied engagement that was between us, ere this unhappiness came to my knowledge and yours—do not suffer it to bind you now. It is a fearful disgrace to attach to my poor mother, and it is reflected upon me."

"Were your father living, Annabel, should you say the disgrace was also reflected upon *him?*"

"Oh, no, no. I could not do so. My good father! honourable and honoured. Never upon him."

I laughed a little at her want of logic.

"Annabel, my dear, you have yourself answered the question. As I hold you to my heart now, so will I, in as short a time as may be, hold you in my home and at my hearth. Let what will betide, you shall have one true friend to shelter and protect you with his care and love for ever and for ever."

Her tears were falling.

"Oh, please, please, Charles! I am sure it ought not to be. Aunt Lucy would tell you so."

Aunt Lucy came in at that moment, and proved to be on my side. She would be going to Madeira at the close of the summer, and the difficulty as to what was to be done then with Annabel had begun to trouble her greatly.

"I cannot take her with me, you see, Charles," she said. "In her mother's precarious state, the child must not absent herself from England. Still less can I leave her to her mother's care. Therefore I think your proposal exactly meets the dilemma. I suppose matters have been virtually settled between you for some little time now."

"Oh, Aunt Lucy!" remonstrated Annabel, blushing furiously.

"Well, my dear, and I say it is all for the best. If you can suggest a better plan I am willing to hear it."

Annabel sat silent, her head drooping.

"I may tell you this much, child: your father looked forward to it and approved it. Not that he would have allowed the marriage to take place just yet had he lived; I am sure of that; but he is not living, and circumstances alter cases."

"I am sure he liked me, Miss Brightman," I ventured to put in, as modestly as I could, "and I believe he would have consented to our marriage."

"Yes, he liked you very much; and so do I," she added, laughing. "I wish I could say as much for Mrs. Brightman. The opposition, I fancy, will come from her."

"You think she will oppose it?" I said—and indeed the doubt had lain in my own mind.

"I am afraid so. Of course there will be nothing for it but patience. Annabel cannot marry without her consent."

How a word will turn the scales of our hopes and fears! That

Mrs. Brightman would oppose and wither our bright prospects came to me in that moment with the certainty of conviction.

"Come what, come may, we will be true to each other," I whispered to Annabel the next afternoon. We were standing at the end of the pier, looking out upon the calm sea, flashing in the sunshine, and I imprisoned her hand momentarily in mine. "If we have to exercise all the patience your Aunt Lucy spoke of, we will still hope on and put our trust in heaven."

"Even so, Charles."

The evening was yet early when I reached London, and I walked home from the station. St. Mary's was striking half-past seven as I passed it. At the self-same moment, an arm was inserted into mine. I turned quickly, wondering if anyone had designs upon my small hand-bag.

"All right, Charley! I'm not a burglar."

It was only Lake. "Why, Arthur! I thought you had gone to Oxford until Monday!"

"Got news last night that the fellow could not have me: had to go down somewhere or other," he answered, as we walked along arm-in-arm. "I say, I had a bit of a scare just now."

"In what way?"

"I thought I saw Tom pass. Tom Heriot," he added in a whisper.

"Oh, but that's impossible you know, Lake," I said, though I felt my pulses quicken. "All your fancy."

"It was just under that gas-lamp at the corner of Wellington Street," Lake went on. "He was sauntering along as if he had nothing to do, muffled in a coat that looked a mile too big for him, and a red comforter. He lifted his face in passing, and stopped suddenly, as if he had recognised me, and were going to speak; then seemed to think better of it, turned on his heel and walked back the way he had been coming. Charley, if it was not Tom Heriot, I never saw such a likeness as that man bore to him."

My lips felt glued. "It could not have been Tom Heriot, Lake. You know Tom is at the Antipodes. We will not talk of him, please. Are you coming home with me?"

"Yes. I was going on to Barlow's Chambers, but I'll come with you instead."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN EVENING VISITOR.

THE spring flowers were showing themselves, and the May was budding in the hedges. I thought how charming it all looked as I turned, this Monday afternoon, into Mrs. Brightman's grounds, where laburnums drooped their graceful blossoms, and lilacs filled the air with their perfume; how significantly it all spoke to the heart of renewed life after the gloom of winter, the death and decay of nature.

Mrs. Brightman was herself enjoying the spring-tide. She sat, robed in crape, on a bench amidst the trees, on which the sun was shining. What a refined, proud, handsome face was hers! but pale and somewhat haggard now. No other trace of her recent illness was apparent, except a nervous trembling of the hands.

"This is a surprise," she said, holding out one of those hands to me quite cordially. "I thought you had been too busy of late to visit me in the day-time."

"Generally I am very busy, but I made time to come to-day. I have something of importance to say to you, Mrs. Brightman. Will you hear me?"

She paused to look at me; a searching, doubtful look. Did she fear that I was about to speak to her of her *failing?* The idea occurred to me.

"Certainly," she coldly replied. "Business must, of course, be attended to. Would you prefer to go indoors or to sit out here?"

"I would rather remain here. I am not often favoured with such a combination of velvet lawn and sunshine and sweet scents.

She made room for me beside her. And, with as little circumlocution as possible, I brought out what I wanted—Annabel. When the heart is truly engaged, a man at these moments can only be bashful, especially when he sees it will be an up-hill fight: but if the heart has nothing to do with the matter, he can be as cool and suave as though he were merely telling an every-day story.

Mrs. Brightman, hearing me to the end, rose haughtily.

"Surely you do not know what you are saying!" she exclaimed. "Or is it that I fail to understand you? You cannot be asking for the hand of my daughter?"

"Indeed—pardon me—I am. Mrs. Brightman, we ——"

"Pardon *me*," she interrupted, "but I must tell you that it is utterly preposterous. Say no more, Mr. Strange; not another word. My daughter cannot marry a professional man. *I* did so, you may reply: yes, and have forfeited my proper place in the world ever since."

"Mr. Brightman would have given Annabel to me."

"Possibly so, though I think not. As Mr. Brightman is no longer here, we may let that supposition alone. And you must allow me to say this much, sir—that it is scarcely seemly to come to me on any such subject so soon after his death."

"But ——" I stopped in embarrassment, unable to give my reason for speaking so soon. How could I tell Mrs. Brightman that it was to afford Annabel a home and a protector: that this, her mother's home, was not fitting for a refined and sensitive girl?

But I pressed the suit. I told her I had Annabel's consent, and that I had recently been with her at Hastings. I should like to have added that I had Miss Brightman's, only that it might have done more harm than good. I spoke very slightly of Miss Brightman's

projected departure from England, when her house would be shut up and Annabel must leave Hastings. And I added that I wanted to make a home for her by that time.

I am sure she caught my implied meaning, for she grew agitated and her hands shook as they lay on her crape dress. Her diamond ring, which she had not discarded, flashed in the sunlight. But she rallied her strength. All her pride rose up in rebellion.

"My daughter has her own home, sir; her home with me—what do you mean? During my illness, I have allowed her to remain with her aunt, but she will shortly return to me."

And when I would have urged further, and pleaded as for something dearer than life, she peremptorily stopped me.

"I will hear no more, Mr. Strange. My daughter is descended on my side from the nobles of the land—you must forgive me for thus alluding to it—and it is impossible that I can forget that, or allow her to do so. Never, with my consent, will she marry out of that grade: a professional man is, in rank, beneath her. This is my decision, and it is unalterable. The subject is at an end, and I beg of you never again to enter upon it."

There was no chance of my pursuing it then, at any rate. Hatch came from the house, a folded cloak on her arm, and approached her mistress.

"The carriage is at the gate, ma'am."

Mrs. Brightman rose at once: she was going for a drive. After what had just passed, I held out my arm to her with some hesitation. She put the tips of her fingers within it, with a stiff "thank you," and we walked to the gate in silence. I handed her into the open carriage; Hatch disposed the cloak upon her knees, assisted by the footman. With a cold bow, Mrs. Brightman, who had already as coldly shaken hands with me, drove away.

Hatch, always ready for a gossip, stood within the little iron gate while she spoke to me.

"We be going away for a bit, sir," she began. "Did you know it?

"No. Mrs. Brightman has not mentioned the matter to me."

"Well, we be then," continued Hatch; "missis and me and Perry. Mr. Close have got her to consent at last. I don't say that she was well enough to go before; Close thought so, but I didn't. He wants her gone, you see, Mr. Charles, to get that fancy out of her head about master."

"But does she still think she sees him?"

"Not for the past few days," replied Hatch. "She has changed her bedroom and taken to the best spare one; and she has been better in herself. Oh, she'll be all right now for a bit, if only ——"

"If only what?" I asked, for Hatch had paused.

"Well, you know, sir. If only she can control herself. I'm certain she is trying to," added Hatch. "There ain't one of us would be

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so glad to find it got rid of for good and all as she'd be. She's put about frightfully yet at Miss Annabel's knowing of it."

"And where is it that you are going to?"

"Missis talked of Cheltenham; it was early, she thought, for the sea-side; but this morning she got a Cheltenham newspaper up, and saw that amid the company staying there were Captain and Lady Grace Chantrey. 'I'm not going where my brother and that wife of his are,' she says to me in a temper—for, as I daresay you've heard, Mr. Charles, they don't agree. And now she talks of Brighton. Whatever place she fixes on, Perry is to be sent on first to take lodgings."

"Well, Hatch," I said, "the change from home will do your mistress good. She is much better. I trust the improvement will be permanent."

"Ah, if she would but take care! It all lies in that, sir," concluded Hatch, as I turned away from the gate, and she went up the garden.

We must go back for a moment to the previous evening. Leaving behind us the church of St. Clement Danes and its lighted windows, Lake and I turned into Essex Street, arm-in-arm, went down it, and reached my door. I opened it with my latch-key. The hall lamp was not lighted, and I wondered at Watts's neglect.

"Go on up to my room," I said to Lake; "I'll follow you in a moment."

He bounded up the stairs, and the next moment Leah came up from the kitchen with a lighted candle, her face white and terrified.

"It is only myself, Leah. Why is the lamp not alight?"

"Heaven be good to us, sir," she cried. "I thought I heard somebody go upstairs."

"Mr. Lake has gone up."

She dropped her candlestick upon the slab, and backed against the wall, looking more white and terrified than ever. I thought she was about to faint.

"Mr. Charles! I feel as if I could die! I ought to have bolted the front door."

"But what for?" I cried, intensely surprised. "What on earth is the matter, Leah?"

"He is up there, sir! Up in your front sitting-room. I put out the hall lamp, thinking the house would be best in darkness."

"Who is up there?" For in the moment's bewilderment I did not glance at the truth.

"Mr. Tom, sir. Captain Heriot."

"*Mr. Tom!* Up there?"

"Not many minutes ago, soon after Watts had gone out to church—for he was late to-night—there came a ring at the door bell," said Leah. "I came up to answer it, thinking nothing. A rough-looking

man stood, in a wide-awake hat, close against the door there. 'Is Mr. Strange at home,' said he, and walked right in. I knew his voice, and I knew him, and I cried out. 'Don't be stupid, Leah; it's only me,' says he. 'Is Mr. Charles upstairs? Nobody with him, I hope.' 'There's nobody to come and put his head in the lion's mouth, as may be said there at all, sir,' said I; and up he went, like a lamplighter. I put the hall lamp out. I was terrified out of my senses, and told him you were at Hastings, but I expected you in soon. And Mr. Charles," wound up Leah, "I think he must have gone clean daft."

"Light the lamp again," I replied. "It always *is* alight, you know. If the house is in darkness, you might have a policeman calling to know what was the matter."

Tom was in a fit of laughter when I got upstairs. He had taken off his rough over-coat and broad-brimmed hat, and stood in a worn—very much worn—suit of brown velveteen breeches and gaiters. Lake stared at him over the table, a comical expression on his face.

"Suppose we shake hands, to begin with," said Lake. And they clasped hands heartily across the table.

"Did you know me just now, in the Strand, Lake?" asked Tom Heriot.

"I did," replied Lake, and his tone proved that he meant it. "I said to Charley here, that I had just seen a fellow very like Tom Heriot; but I knew who it was, fast enough."

"You wouldn't have known me, though, if I hadn't lifted my face to the lamp-light. I forget myself at moments, you see," added Tom, after a pause. "Meeting you unexpectedly, I was about to speak as in the old days, and recollected myself only just in time. I say"—turning himself about in his velveteens—"should you take me for a gamekeeper?"

"No, I should not: you don't look the thing at all," I put in testily, for I was frightfully vexed with him altogether. "I thought you must have been taken up by your especial friend, Wren. Twice have I been to the trysting-place as agreed, but you did not appear."

"No; but I think he nearly had me," replied Tom.

"How was that?"

"I'll tell you," he answered, as we all three took chairs round the fire, and I stirred it into a blaze. "On the Wednesday I did not go out at all; I told you I should not. On the Thursday, after dusk, I went out to meet you, Charley. It was early, and I strolled in for a smoke with Lee and a chat with Miss Betsy. The old man began at once: 'Captain Strange, Policeman Wren has been here, asking questions about you. It seems old Wren is well known in the neighbourhood ——"

"Captain Strange?" cried Lake. "Who is Captain Strange?"

"I am—down there," laughed Tom. "Don't interrupt, please. 'What questions?' I said to Lee. 'Oh, what your name was, and

where you came from, and if I had known you long, and what your ship was called,' answered Lee. 'And you told him?' I asked. 'Well, I should have told him but for Betsy,' he said. 'Betsy spoke up, saying you were a sailor-gentleman that came in to buy tobacco and newspapers; and that was all he got out of us, not your name, captain, or anything. As Betsy said to me afterwards, it was not our place to answer questions about Captain Strange: if the policeman wanted to know anything, let him apply to the captain himself. Which I thought good sense,' concluded Lee. As it was."

"Well, Tom?"

"Well, I thought it about time to go straight home again," said Tom; "and that's why I did not meet you, Charley. And the next day, Friday, I cleared out of my diggings in that quarter of the globe, rigged myself out afresh, and found other lodgings. I am nearer to you now, Charley: vegetating in the wilds over Blackfriars Bridge."

"How could you be so imprudent as to come here to-night? Or to be seen in so conspicuous a spot as the Strand?"

"The fit took me to pay you a visit, old fellow. As to the Strand—it is a fine thoroughfare, you know, and I had not set eyes on it since last summer. I walked up and down a bit, listening to the church bells, and looking about me."

"You turn everything into ridicule, Tom."

"Better that, Charley, than into sighing and groaning."

"How did you know that Leah would open the door to you? Watts might have done so."

I had it all cut-and-dried. 'Is Mrs. Brown at home?' I should have said, in a voice Watts would never have known. 'Mrs. Brown don't live here,' old Watts would have answered; upon which I should have politely begged his pardon and walked off."

"All very fine, Tom, and you may think yourself amazingly clever; but as sure as you are living, you will run these risks once too often."

"Not I. Didn't I give old Leah a scare! You should have heard her shriek."

"Suppose it had been some enemy—some stickler for law and justice—that I had brought home with me to-night, instead of Lake?"

"But it wasn't," laughed Tom. "It was Lake himself. And I guess he is as safe as you are."

"Be sure of that," added Lake. "But what do you think of doing, Heriot? You cannot hide away for ever in the wilds of Blackfriars. *I* would not answer for your safety there for a day."

"Goodness knows," said Tom. "Perhaps Charley could put me up here—in one of his top bedrooms?"

Whether he spoke in jest or earnest, I knew not. He might remember that I was running a risk in concealing him even for an hour or two. Were it discovered, the law might make me answer for it.

"I should like something to eat, Charley."

Leaving him with Lake, I summoned Leah, and bade her bring up quickly what she had. She speedily appeared with the tray.

"Good old Leah!" said Tom to her. "That ham looks tempting.'

"Mr. Tom, if you go on like this, loitering in the open streets and calling at houses, trouble will overtake you," returned Leah, in much the same tone she had used to reprimand him when a child. "I wonder what your dear, good mother would say to it if she saw you throwing yourself into peril. Do you remember, sir, how often she would beg of you to be good?"

"My mother!" repeated Tom, who was in one of his lightest moods. "Why you never saw her. She was dead and buried and gone to heaven before you knew anything of us."

"Ah well, Master Tom, you know I mean Mrs. Heriot—afterwards Mrs. Strange. It wouldn't be you, sir, if you didn't turn everything into a jest. She was a good mother to you all."

"That she was, Leah. Excused our lessons for the asking, and fed us on jam."

He was taking his supper rapidly the while; for of course he had to be away before church was over, and Watts was home again. The man might have been true and faithful, little doubt of it; but it would have added one more item to the danger.

Lake went out and brought a cab; and Tom, his wide-awake low on his brow, his rough coat on, and his red comforter round about his throat, vaulted into it, to be conveyed over Blackfriars Bridge to any point that he might choose to indicate.

"It is an amazing hazard his going about like this," cried Lake, as we sat down together in front of the fire. "He must be got out of England as quickly as possible."

"But he won't go."

"Then, mark my words, Charles, bad will come of it."

(*To be continued.*)

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By Arthur Montefiore, F.R.G.S.

AMONG the various Jubilee celebrations of the year 1887, that of the great tea industry of India claimed a prominent place on the double score of its personal and financial interest to many thousands of our countrymen.

About twenty millions of British gold are invested in the tea-gardens of India, and some thousands of Englishmen are engaged in managing the half-a-million of coolies employed in the gardens. A brief resumé of the salient facts connected with the growth of this industry, and a description of life and labour on an Assamese tea-garden have, therefore, a special meaning at this time, and will be read with interest by the rapidly increasing class of consumers of Indian tea.

We have received this last year from India about ninety million pounds of tea. Moreover, in the month of May last, the proportion of Indian to Chinese tea in the English market, was as fifty-one to forty-nine. And yet, fifty years ago, not a score of pounds was imported into England. Fifty years ago a few pounds of Indian tea were sold in Mincing Lane at nineteen shillings a pound; to-day, a fairly good article can be bought for eighteenpence; and we are led to expect that the crop of 1890 will be sold in London at sixpence a pound!

China has been forced to yield its monopoly and take a second place, while British pertinacity and vigour have once more asserted their supremacy. In fact, the Caucasian has met the Celestial, and by sheer superiority, driven him step by step from his vantage ground.

Civilisation and its resources, coupled with its readiness and ability to make use of natural advantages, have undoubtedly been the cause of this. In India—and when we say India we mean the tea-districts of the Punjaub, the Neilgherries, Bengal, but far and away and ahead of them all, of Assam—when once the leaf is picked, the remaining treatment is entirely performed by machinery, which involves cheapness, rapidity and less variable results. Rollers and driers, equalisers and sifters, are all worked by steam in thoroughly well-appointed factories.

Not so, however, with the Celestial. With his well-known reverence for custom, it is not altogether surprising to find him still working with his own hands, as his fathers did aforetime; and in every stage of the manufacture the results are as less remunerative as they are less satisfactory.

Again, Assam has the advantage of China in its tea-plant.

The indigenous tree of Assam will grow to a height of twenty and

sometimes thirty feet, and the leaf it bears is large—six times as large as that produced by the dwarf shrub of China. Granted, even, that the conditions are the same, the crop of Assam is at least twice as much per acre as that of China.

But the conditions are far from identical; everything is on the side of Assam—science, nature, machinery, British energy and British capital. A scientific study and comprehension have enabled the Assamese tea-planters to combat successfully with one obstacle after another, and the probability is that in two or three years the quarter of a million acres now under cultivation will yield the marvellous total of 120,000,000 lbs. of first-rate tea, and the planters of Assam will then command the market.

Although the price of tea is rapidly declining, the cost of producing it fortunately diminishes pari passu; and the great tea-planting companies pay a good dividend and have every reason to be well satisfied.

Though the prophets of evil are abroad, tea-planting may still be regarded as a profitable investment, and as a lucrative as well as a pleasant mode of employing one's capital and one's labour. Many hundreds of our countrymen are leading busy lives and making a handsome income out of tea.

But it must be remembered that capital is an absolute essential to success. The longest and most valuable experience will never supply the want of capital in this industry. Capital and plenty of it is the first thing needful; then experience. The latter may be gained by working for two or three seasons as an assistant-overseer on some garden. It is not difficult to procure such an appointment, and the salary is amply sufficient for all ordinary needs.

Anyone who is going to Assam with this intention should make enquiries at the offices and head quarters of the numerous companies at Calcutta. A man of intelligence, who comes into the country with capital, is sure to be treated well, and will find no real difficulty in procuring an appointment. At the expiration of his "apprenticeship" he will either singly or in partnership, as his funds or his experience may require, enter on his career as a tea-planter, with a fair prospect of success before him.

The best soil for the tea-plant is a rich light loam, and this is fortunately not difficult to find.

As a rule the soil of Assam is wonderfully fertile, the great proportion of it being of an alluvial nature and rich in vegetable matters, with the accompanying advantages of phosphorus and potash. In some places a white, coarse sand "strikes" up, in which are found the grindings of lime rocks in abundance; and below all there is a general substratum of blue clay.

Assam is in configuration somewhat like a saucer; it is a vast plain or shallow basin, surrounded but not traversed by elevated regions. At one time it was undoubtedly one great bog, and even now peat may

be found all over the country at an average depth of fifty feet. When the damp heat of the climate is added to this, it is not to be wondered at that the country is as favourable to vegetation as it is inimical to the health of the European. Cholera and dysentery, jungle fever and dropsy, rank chief among the diseases of Assam; but the man who is temperate in all things and, particularly, withstands the too-general custom of "nipping," has every right to expect fair health. I have known men who enjoyed the most robust health and strength after many years' continuous residence in the country.

The culture of a tea garden cannot, of course, be described in full within the space of an article. Moreover, the methods vary with the size and situation of the garden, the number of labourers employed, and the amount of capital at command.

For example, a large number of planters have only a hundred acres under tea; while the Select Tea Company alone has 30,000 acres in Sylet, Assam, which are being rapidly brought under cultivation.

But the best-sized garden for the individual planter, as opposed to a company, is one of two-hundred-and-fifty acres. Such a garden will produce a large amount of tea, will pay for the best kinds of machinery, and should enable the proprietor in ordinarily good seasons to carry over to his reserve fund a handsome balance. The usual practice with a garden of this ultimate size is to plant out a hundred acres the first year, a hundred the second year, and the remaining fifty the third.

The Assam tea-plant, as has been stated, is indigenous to the country, and may be considered a tree, whilst the Chinese plant is a shrub. The former will frequently reach twenty and even thirty feet in height, while the latter seldom exceeds four feet. This tree is grown from the seed in nurseries, and at the age of nine months transplanted into the garden. The planting season extends over the months of December, January and February. Plucking begins when the tree is three years old, and at the age of eight years the tree is in its prime. The plucking season lasts from April till November; the first teas of a season generally arriving in this country in May.

The chief enemies to the tea-tree are insects.

In a tropical country like Assam these are numerous and large, and the labourers are constantly employed in ridding the crop from such pests, and applying preventives. Of hurtful insects the red spider and the green fly are the most dangerous.

Then, also, a parasitic fungus frequently appears on the bark, together with a white scale. Unless these are removed, the health and even the life of the tree is in jeopardy. In addition to insects and fungus, climatic influences sometime work much havoc with the delicate tea-tree. Exceptional drought in the dry season or severe frosts in the short cold season will often destroy a whole crop, although they seldom permanently damage the tree.

Cultivation goes on through the greater part of the year. The ground is carefully hoed and re-hoed several times, and, in some instances, harrowed; and the trees are carefully trained up in the first two years and pruned in the succeeding ones.

The heavier work is done by coolie-labour, but women and children are chiefly employed in plucking. As each batch of plucking is finished, the leaves are washed and then placed on large wire-gauze trays over charcoal *chulas*, or brick ovens. The washing, drying, rolling, sifting and distributing of the leaves over the *chulas* are done in most gardens by machinery.

When the process is complete, the crop is kept in bulk for a short time, and then packed in boxes that contain from eighty to a hundred-and-twenty pounds. These are sent by steamers to Calcutta, where the tea is sold to wholesale merchants at about fifty per cent. of the retail price in England.

A few figures as to cost and profit may be interesting; and, although of course they cannot represent individual cases of failure or success, they may be taken as giving a fair average representation of the tea-industry in Assam at the present time.

Supposing a man starts to make a garden two hundred and fifty acres in extent, he should be prepared to invest about £12,000 in his undertaking before he can expect to have a bearing garden, and a properly built factory thoroughly well furnished with machinery.

The average annual cost of cultivation will be from £8 to £9 per acre, that is to say, about £2,000 per annum. This item will include the wages of the coolies and their *sirdars*, or coolie overseers, and the maintenance of the buildings and machinery. On the other hand, his profits at the present time may, in ordinarily good seasons, be set down at about £5 per acre, which, in a full-bearing garden of two hundred and fifty acres, would be a net profit of £1,250 per annum—a very good return for a £12,000 investment.

Of course these figures refer only to average years and a properly handled garden; in exceptionally bad and good years the losses and profits would undoubtedly be greater.

The labourers are chiefly coolies imported from Bengal.

The native Assamese are intensely lazy, and leave their women to do most of the work. The native criminal class, however, is small: the general characteristics of the people being petty roguery, servility, and a contentment bred of fatalism. They are great consumers of *kari*, or opium, which makes them listless, and they require as much supervision at their work as the indigo-coolies of the Mofussil, the Madrassees on the paddy-fields of the south, or the negroes of the southern states of America.

Ordinary coolie labourers earn for the first three years five rupees a month, increasing to six rupees afterwards. Women get four rupees a month for the first three years and then rise to five rupees. Coolie overseers, or *sirdars*, get from ten to twelve rupees a month.

Assistant overseers, who are invariably Europeans, receive a salary of from £15 to £20 a month; and managers will draw salaries ranging from £300 to £600 per annum, with an almost invariable commission of five per cent.

About two coolies are required per acre, and, consequently, on a garden of two hundred and fifty acres there are about five hundred coolies, with their wives and children, in addition to their sirdars. The village which they create forms quite a populous centre; and as the proprietor of the gardens frequently contracts for their food-supply, they make a considerable claim upon his time and trouble.

Assam tea—and Indian tea generally—when manufactured, varies from Chinese tea in more ways than one. It is stronger than the latter; it makes the liquor into which it is infused darker in colour, thicker in quality, and more pungent in taste.

People have fancied from this that it is naturally coarser and inferior, and that it is more likely to play havoc with their nerves. This is a mistake. Indian tea, if mixed with a greater proportion of water or blended with the milder teas of China, in order to reduce it to the usual standard of strength, is as wholesome and aromatic as any produced on the globe.

At the present time it seems morally certain that the future of Indian tea is assured, and that the British empire will be able to supply all the tea which is at present consumed in the British Isles. Chinese tea will cease to be the chief staple of the market, but for a long time it will continue to be largely imported for the purpose of blending with Indian teas. Prices will be very low, and the planters of Assam will have to be unremitting in their efforts and economy if they desire to maintain the present very satisfactory returns from their tea-gardens.

A CAPRICCIO.

A Love Story.

CHAPTER VI.

"COME LET US KISS AND PART."

I LAY trembling in bed that night.

That Charlie should turn out to be Lady Corisande's "adorable angel," seemed too strange to be true. But now I understood it all. She was the beautiful cousin of whom he had spoken, and this grand old place, in which I had been living so unsuspectingly, was the home which, by rights, ought to belong to him, and which until the last ten years had been the family seat of the Everrils for centuries.

How dense I must have been not to have guessed it sooner. And now that I had at last learnt the truth, what was I to do? Give him up, and let him forget the silly little country lass, who was not half worth the sacrifice of wealth and ease, and of a beautiful home of which she would never make a fit and worthy mistress? Yes! There could be no doubt that that was my duty. I must return home at once, before matters became more complicated, and before Lady Corisande gave me an ignominious dismissal. If it were for Charlie's good, there was no sacrifice for which I was not ready—even to parting with him for ever, and dying (here two tears rolled down my cheeks and on to my pillow) and dying of a broken heart in the flower of my youth and beau——

A low, but only too expressive knock at the door checked my disconsolate reflections, making me start and turn cold with apprehension of Lady Corisande's wrath.

"Come in," I called weakly, scrubbing my cheeks to hide the trace of tears. "Come in."

The door slowly opened, and Lady Corisande entered, arrayed in a long dressing-gown of crimson satin, and holding a lighted candle in her hand.

"I wish to speak a few words to you,' she said coldly, walking majestically up to my bedside. "Are you wide enough awake to attend to what I say?"

"Yes, madame," I whispered. Then there was a painful silence, whilst I glanced nervously at the handsome figure in its long red robes, and at the brilliant face which, just now, looked so haughty and forbidding.

"Celia," she began at last, "why have you deceived me? Why did you not tell me that Lord Everril was the person of whom you

have been thinking all this time, when you assured me it was 'nobody'?"

"How could I tell? Oh, madame, believe me. I did not *dream* that it was Char— Lord Everril whom you were expecting."

"Yes, you have deceived me," she went on bitterly. "After all my kindness to you, you have tried to rob me of the affection of one who is far above you. You have tried to come between us—to—to—in short," with increasing indignation, "to rival *me*—to steal him from *me*. Presumptuous child!"

"Indeed, not!" I cried with some warmth. "You would not tell me his name. I did not try to steal him from anyone; and I knew him long before I saw you. And I wish—I wish I had stayed at home and never come here to be accused of I know not what. Ah! how can you be so unkind?"

I was working myself into an angry excitement. After all, had I not the sweet assurance that *I* was the one he loved—and not this beautiful widow who looked upon him with such a provoking sense of rightful possession.

"You must go from here," she said, pacing up and down in front of my bed. "You cannot stay here; that is certain. But, as I do not see how you can leave me at a moment's notice, like this, for the next few days whilst you are here, you must promise to avoid him and to keep in your own place. If he desires to see you, you must have the *migraine*, and stay in your room. You must not meet under any circumstances."

"I understand, madame," I murmured. "I will obey you."

"You are young and foolish and romantic. But I forgive you. Only you must give up your silly little dream; it is an utter impossibility for both of you. He can never," she added scornfully, "have thought seriously of you; you are a mere baby. I am distressed to have to say it, but I am disappointed in you, Celia. Come! Do not cry. Such nonsense is not worth the trouble of tears."

With that she rose, patted my head, as much as to say that I was a baby incapable of understanding anything but a rattle, and sailed slowly out of the room; victorious, alas, over the poor, insignificant little maid who lay in bed, weeping her eyes out till the morning broke.

I remained in my room all the following day.

In the morning Lady Corisande paid me a short and not very amiable visit, leaving me a little more miserable than she had found me.

This time she tried persuasion instead of reproach. She represented to me how much misery Lord Everril's marriage with me would entail, and how injurious it would be to him in every respect. I was helpless in such hands, and believed her implicitly. I was not

versed in the ways of the world, nor had I learnt how literally true it is that "Noblesse oblige."

As Lady Corisande went on piling up the agony, convincing me of what vital importance it was that Lord Everril should "marry money," and keep up the old name in its former glory, I began to marvel at my own overweening presumption.

"But," I ventured to suggest timidly, "why should he keep up the name, madame, against his will? What does it mean—*to keep up a name?* He will always be an Everril, and if he wishes to cover the name with glory will poverty prevent him? Is it not industry and perseverance that bring men fame and honour?"

"Little simpleton! Do you think the future Everrils, living on an income of £1,000 or £2,000 a-year, will count as *anybodies?* No! They will disappear as though they had never existed, and be heard of no more. And why? Because of a ridiculous, boyish whim, and because a vain child aspires to wear a coronet, forsooth! although she brings ruin and misfortune on a whole family by her obstinacy."

"It is not that!" I cried, almost dancing with rage, whilst Bijou and Mignon rushed at me, yelping discordantly, and pecking viciously at my skirts. "I would not wear a coronet if you were to offer me one this minute. If anyone is like that, and is *vulgar*, it is the Everrils and Derings themselves, with their vulgar pride of money, and old names, and noblesse oblige, and all that. If *that* is a sign of glory," with withering contempt, "and of good birth, then I am *proud* to be a nobody."

When I paused, out of breath, looking, I am sure, very unheroic, with my tumbled hair, flushed cheeks, and features of childish wrath, I fully expected Madame to bring down the house over my head, or otherwise to annihilate me for my temerity.

But to my surprise she said nothing; merely rose with great dignity, and left me without another word or glance.

This was the day on which Charlie's mother was to arrive at Brantwood with her daughters, Lady Jane and Lady Blanche. About four o'clock that afternoon I watched the carriage drive up to the front door, heard gay voices and laughter, and presently saw the happy party strolling about the lawn and shrubberies. And then I sat down and cried disconsolately, because they all seemed to get on so *very* well without me.

I began to tire dreadfully of my imprisonment. My thoughts grew sentimental and morbid, and I examined myself in the looking-glass, in melancholy hopes of finding the hectic spot on each cheek that is said to betoken an early death of consumption. Alas! I was still plump and healthy, with no apparent physical change, except that my eyes were dull and my eyelids red; and somehow that did not help to make me look interesting.

Nevertheless I was sincerely miserable; and I was beginning to

feel almost tragic, when there came a knock at the door, and Madame again entered.

She looked more like her usual self, and actually stroked me on the cheeks calling me her "poor, sad little shepherdess."

But the torture was not yet over; and this time it was all the harder to bear because it came in a form there was no resisting, just from its plausible gentleness.

My girlish innocence was but a poor weapon to use against the finesse of Lady Corisande's diplomacy, and my submission was a mere matter of time and patience and skilful argument.

She told me how she and all his relations and friends loved Charlie as surely no young man ever had the fortune—or misfortune—of being loved before. How they trusted to him to redeem his family, and to be the "world's gay favourite" in all things. How it had been almost as good as settled that she and Charlie should marry each other. And how Lady Everril and the whole noble race of Derings had put on sackcloth and ashes and were reduced to despair, simply through the coming of an insignificant little companion—a child who had no "name to keep up," and nothing to call her own save, perhaps, a pretty face and a pair of bright eyes.

"After knowing all this," Lady Corisande concluded, "will you still persist in being the apple of discord amongst us, Celia?"

"No—I will not," I replied; adding half under my breath: "For you have cut me in two, between you all."

"You will mend. You are young, and this is but a child's fancy. I can trust you, cannot I, Celia?"

"Trust me?" I cried. "Only try."

"That is my wise shepherdess again. Good-night. Take a run in the garden whilst we are at dinner. No one is about. It will bring back your roses, and you will soon be as gay as ever, and as happy."

"No, not happy," I thought sadly. "Never so happy again. Oh, mother, why did you ever send me from you?"

Then a sudden impulse made me seize Lady Corisande's hand as she was leaving the room, and exclaim wistfully:

"Oh, madame, only tell me this. Does *he* have nothing to say in the matter? Is he ready to obey others, even in this?"

"Noblesse oblige," she said coldly, and so left me.

The fresh evening air restored my spirits a little, as I ran in and out of the shrubberies, gloveless and hatless, that the soft breeze might cool my forehead and swollen eyelids.

There is something about the soft, misty summer gloaming that makes it seem, so I always think, to belong especially to lovers.

The silence; the quiet, shadowy twilight stealing like sweet sleep over the land; the distant tinkle of sheep-bells and the lowing of cattle as they are driven home through the meadows; the gentle sough of dying breezes in the high tree-tops; all this is dedicated to lovers' vows and heart flutterings. At least so it seems to me. For, though

I am an old woman now, whenever the long summer evenings come again, my thoughts rush back to that twilight hour in the garden, when my heart was bursting with love, and calling out for Charlie to be at my side—here, where there was no one to disturb our quiet, but the cooing wood-pigeons, and now and then a rabbit that rushed away at the sound of a footstep.

When I came in again and ran stealthily up to my room, I found a tempting little supper laid out for me: and, neatly folded up in a napkin, my first and my last billet-doux!

How I blushed and trembled as, with eager fingers, I tore it open and read the few, hastily-scrawled lines.

I have that note still; and now that I am older and wiser I can see that it is very sentimental and ridiculous; so ridiculous that I should be afraid to copy it out here, if I did not know that the young folk who take a flight in the "Fool's Paradise" nowadays are not one whit more sensible than they were in the good old times.

"Sweetest heart," it ran, "this is to assure you that my love will last for ever. If we may not marry with the consent of my family, we will marry without it. Let me have a few words to say that you are true to me. I long for a glance at your dear face and eyes. Be brave, dear one, and faithful.

EVERRIL.

"P.S. If I can't get over that French fiddlestick I will see myself hung."

How I kissed that little note and cried over it, praying for strength to act as was best for Charlie.

For my mind was made up on the side of self-sacrifice. Lady Corisande, on eloquently convincing me that it was really for Charlie's good that she wished me to give him up to her, had won the day.

It seemed hard and cruel to leave his note unanswered. What could I say? Should I be brave, and put an end to our little love story with a few cold words that would save us the pain and misery of meeting only to part for ever?

"It is for his sake," I kept whispering to myself; and then I hastily wrote a little answer to his letter, heedless that it was all blotched and slurred by my tears.

When the maid came to take away my supper she lingered a moment.

"Can I take an answer to the note?" she asked presently. "It won't go no further than me, miss."

"It is no secret," I said, as haughtily as I could. "Yes; you may take this note; and say that it is the *last*, and that I will receive no others."

With that, I carelessly gave her a folded slip of paper that held my death-blow, as I told myself tragically, and which might, just at first, make Charlie, too, sorry that we had ever met.

It ran thus:

"DEAR LORD EVERRIL,—It is best that we should not meet again. As we were foolish in the past, let us be wise in the future. Allow me to wish you and Lady Corisande every happiness.

"I don't mind a bit, Charlie, if *you* are happy.

"CELIA RANDOM."

What a grand commencement! But what a lame, very lame conclusion!

CHAPTER VII.

"UNCERTAIN, COY AND HARD TO PLEASE."

MEANTIME, I did not intend to be kept much longer a prisoner at the will of my capricious mistress; and the next day I told Lady Corisande that, if she had not already done so, I must write to my mother telling her to expect me home at the earliest opportunity. Madame made no objection. In fact I felt that she was longing to be rid of me; but her manner to me was certainly kinder than it had been since Lord Everril's arrival; and as a proof of her restored goodwill and trust she gave me permission to walk in the woods whenever I pleased.

"You will find it pleasant and quiet there," she added; "and it is not likely that you will be annoyed by meeting us."

It was on the tip of my tongue to observe that the annoyance would not be on my side, but, fearing to forfeit this slight return to liberty, I refrained, and only expressed my gratitude for her kindness.

Glad of anything to relieve the monotony of my dull and solitary days, I availed myself of her offer; and running through the garden presently found myself in the cool shade of the woods, and free—as I understood from Lady Corisande's words—from any fear of meeting him whom I most longed, yet most dreaded to see.

The sun, glinting through rifts in the thick foliage, flecked the mossy carpet under my feet with dancing yellow lights; birds were chirruping in the trees, with a peculiar succulent sound that made the whole wood seem to resound with the soft kisses of children; and in the distance I could hear laughter and chattering from the labourers in the fields, as they turned the sweetly-smelling hay.

I, alone, was desolate and solitary. It was little use trying to persuade myself that I must be sensible and strong-minded; for to tell the truth, I was as thoroughly miserable as I could be. I daresay anyone who hears this little story from my own lips, will imagine that my feelings for Charlie were neither very deep nor very strong. I have no words to explain what I felt for him; it was too firmly fixed in my heart to bear probing into; and even in those days, when it was all passionately fresh and vivid, to outward appearance I was self-contained and undemonstrative.

I can only say that I loved him. Sometimes I took a half-melancholy pleasure in comparing our misfortunes with those of Romeo and the fair Capulet, and then I would repeat to myself those tender words of sixteen-year-old Juliet:

> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep; the more I give to thee
> The more I have, for both are infinite."

I was thinking somewhat in this strain, when I heard the patter of feet behind me, and a breathless voice calling my name. My first instinct was to hide, knowing how dire would be Madame's wrath should she discover that I had spoken to Lord Everril, when a nearer call assured me that it was not Charlie but M. le Comte who was following me.

This gallant and exquisitely-dressed little Frenchman always gave me the impression that he could not run even to save his life. He was like a Dresden china figure, more for ornament than for use; and now that he was exerting himself to such unusual effort, his appearance, when he approached me, was bordering on the ludicrous. His neck-tie was awry, he was panting for breath, and his greeting bow had lost its customary grace.

"Ah! I thought so," he panted. "When I saw a—fairy—form—flit—past, I said: 'Voilà! There goes the victime.'"

"Victim!" I answered bitterly. "Say rather the apple of discord and dissension, as Madame has it."

"Victime all the same," he replied. "Victime to the caprice of an eccentric grande dame. You are much to be pitied for that, it seems to me. Tell me, my pretty Célie, art thou very sad?"

"No, indeed, monsieur," I returned proudly. "I begin not to care at all, and to see that I have been much mistaken in the goodness and generosity of the 'noblesse.'"

"Then you love not this beau garçon—this brave young man who is like an Apollo, and who is, of all things, the most charming?"

He was a curious little creature, this French exquisite, with his curled moustachios, sparkling dark eyes and quaintly turned phrases. I hardly knew whether or not to resent his questions, and answered in a scarcely audible voice:

"No, monsieur."

"That is a pity. For do you not know that he is in despair for you, and ready to commit any foolishness for your sake?"

In spite of a certain affectation of manner, the Comte was one of the most kind-hearted men in the world, and I read in his face such unfeigned sympathy and desire to comfort me, that my pride was disarmed, and I cried pathetically:

"And I, monsieur, would do *anything* for him. Ah, that is what makes me so miserable."

"Now I begin to see. You say to yourself, 'Here am I, without

rank, without fortune—it is not for his good to love me. And there is his cousin who is rich and beautiful; if he marries her he wins back his estate, his moneys. Therefore, I will be a willing victim and resign him—for true love's sake.' Have I not reason, mademoiselle? You need not fear me. I am come to give you all my help."

"Oh, you are too kind," I cried, touched by these first words of pity or sympathy that I had received. "Everyone but you says I am in the wrong. What can I do? It is not to be expected that Madame should give him up! And I would *rather*, I would, indeed, let him think that I do not much mind, so that he may marry her and forget me, and be happy. Then all would come right."

"For him—yes. The truth is," and here M. le Comte lowered his voice confidentially: "the adorable Corisande is, not alone capricious, but also eccentric. The one dream of her life is—matrimony! She is not now so young as she was; and clever and beautiful though she is, it is not everyone who would have the courage to take her for his wife. And so it is that only one or two insignificant—what is it you call them?—*nobodies*, have wished to marry with her. But she is haughty; they are not good enough for her. There is only this young lord who seems to her suitable; and conceive, mademoiselle, what she must feel when you, with your beaux yeux, come and steal his heart from her. It must be hard, that."

"If only she truly cared for him, I could bear it better," I said. "Oh! monsieur, is there no hope for me?"

"One," he said, taking hold of one of my hands. "Only one."

"*Is* there one? Oh! what is it? Tell me—is it anything that I can do—that I can say?"

"Parfaitement. You have but to be docile—to be what you always are, mademoiselle. It is—you will not be angry?"

"No, no! Tell me. There is nothing I will not do."

"It is to allow me *to make my love to you*," said the Comte, with a low bow, and an expressive glance from his dark eyes, as he raised my hand gently to his lips.

"Ah! monsieur. How can you be so unkind—so cruel?"

I snatched my hand from him indignantly. Was he laughing at me, and amusing himself at the expense of my innocence and grief? Or did he really mean what he had said? It was impossible that he could be serious. He had only raised my hopes to dash them to the ground with cruel mockery and insult. My heart was bursting with anger and misery; and I was turning away, almost crying with disappointment and outraged feelings, when he detained me by laying a fatherly hand on my shoulder.

"Come, come, mademoiselle," he said kindly; "you misunderstand me. As I have said, you have but to be docile. It is only a little ruse of which I have been thinking. It is for your good, and also for mine."

"But I do not see how,' I cried, more and more puzzled. "What good *can* it do?"

"Listen. First, there is Madame, who is above all things—jealous."

"Yes. Indeed she is."

"Second, there is you, the victim, who loves this young nobleman."

"Yes. But what of all that, monsieur?"

"And last, there is me, who loves the adorable Corisande!"

Having said this he drew himself upright, and touched his heart with his hand, with an old-fashioned, sentimental air of gallantry that at any other time would have moved me to laughter.

But now I was so overcome by surprise that words failed me, and I stared at him in wondering silence as he stood before me in that heroic attitude, and with such genuine emotion in his face.

"Do not mistake me," he went on presently; "when I find in her faults. With me, love is not blind; and when I say that she is capricious, jealous, eccentric, it means not that I care for her the less because of these little faults. On the contrary, they are ravishing in my eyes."

"Hark!" I interrupted. "Someone comes."

"And I have your promise," he went on, heedless of my caution and raising his voice. "Mademoiselle, how happy you have made me. My affection——"

"Oh, please don't!" I whispered eagerly. "It is she; it is Madame herself."

I seemed fated to be thrust in Lady Corisande's path; already she was close beside us, and could not have failed to overhear M. le Comte's last remarks.

"Monsieur seems to be amusing himself," she said, in clear, cold ones; "I nave been wondering what had become of him. Ah! Celia? So it is you, is it?"

"It is an Arcadia here in the wood," M. le Comte hastened to answer. "It is a place to live in for ever."

"With Celia as Arcadian shepherdess," she replied with a sarcastic laugh. "Sweet simplicity in the woodlands."

"Exactly. How the idea is appropriate. Sweet simplicity."

"Perhaps you would prefer to remain here and finish your idyll? Or are you disposed to join us in the garden, where we are regaling ourselves with fruit and cream?" said Madame, in a way that admitted of but one answer. "Au revoir, Celia. Do not lose yourself in these woods."

M. le Comte kissed the tips of his fingers to me, and, to my dismay, bent on me a look of such exaggerated admiration that I blushed for shame as Madame's eyebrows rose contemptuously. As she left me, she gave me a glance she might have thrown to her waiting-maid had the latter ventured to thwart her will; and I could not feel that M. le

Comte's well-meant intrigue had done more than precipitate me yet farther in my slough of despond.

I watched the two figures strolling down the green pathway, where the branches made a fairy bower over their heads; and when they were out of sight, I sank on the mossy carpet and burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

Here was a strange state of affairs! And not the least strange part of it was M. le Comte's love for Lady Corisande, and his very original method of showing it.

It was finally arranged that I should leave Brantwood on Monday (it being now Thursday), and it may be imagined how eagerly I longed once more to be at home, where I could pour out my sorrows in my mother's sympathetic ears, and be petted and soothed and comforted in her loving arms.

The life that I was leading was irksome in the extreme; even the woods had their limits, and in a day or two I had thoroughly explored them. I began to feel like a caged animal. What right had Madame to treat me thus? Why should I give up my love to please her? Why should I not come boldly forward and bid Charlie choose between us?

Ah! why not? I loved him; and that is why I tried to learn the bitter lesson of self-renunciation for his sake.

Now and then, when I was wandering through the woods, M. le Comte d'Estrées contrived to meet me, and raised my spirits a little by his kindness, his quaint mannerisms and oddly-turned phrases. And when we were together it invariably happened, much to my annoyance, that we were discovered by Lady Corisande; and then her lips would tighten, and her whole demeanour expressed disapproval of my want of propriety and apparent coquetry—as if I, alas! could help it.

And once—ah! how well I recollect the wild joy, mingled with pain of that meeting—as I was walking round a turn in the pathway, with my head bent in maiden meditation, whom should I meet but Charlie, of whom I had been dreaming, and for whom I had been longing so earnestly.

Fate certainly did not aid me to keep my resolution of self-sacrifice.

Before I could say a word, he had seized my hand and kissed it.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I have found you, my faithless little Amaryllis."

"Oh, but you must go from me," I said hurriedly, turning my face away that he should not read in it my joy at once more hearing his voice. "Please leave me at once."

"Not I. Do you think it is likely?" he said gaily; "or are you still cruel? I never believed you could be so hard-hearted, Celia. That unkind little note ought to have burnt your fingers as you wrote

it. Am I to believe that you were in earnest, and really meant to give me up? I will not believe it."

"It is best so," I replied, struggling hard not to break down, and crying over and over to myself: "Be brave, *for his sake.*" "You have no right to come after me when I have begged you to leave me in peace."

"No right? Why, Celia, what does it all mean? Am I to go away, and believe that you never cared for me after all? I, who love you with my whole heart and soul."

"It is best so," I repeated drearily. "It is best for both of us."

"If it is your wish, I can have nothing else to say," he answered, drawing himself up stiffly and speaking very coldly. "No doubt, as Lady Corisande says, it is your pleasure to exchange a penniless Englishman for a rich French—fool. It is not for me to argue with you on such a subject."

"You are right," I returned, equally coldly. "On such a subject, as you say, I may have the privilege of making up my own mind."

He was white with suppressed passion. It was only by keeping my own eyes bent on the ground that I could prevent his gaze from tearing my secret from me.

"Then I am to give it up?" he said, below his breath. "Is it all over between you and me, Celia?"

I looked helplessly away from him, up into the dark tree-tops, praying for courage. "For his sake," sighed the wind, "for his sake. Let your love be infinite."

"Yes," I said quietly; "it is all over now."

"Good," he said gravely, turning on his heel. "Let it be so."

Yes, it was all over; the die was cast; and as I wandered home, tired and broken-spirited, I prayed that I might have acted for his good. And I wept until my eyes were heavy and red for the love which I had thrust from me with my own hand, to humour the caprice of Lady Corisande and to save the house of Everril from an untimely and lamentable ruin.

The next morning, just as I was writing my last letter to my mother, Lady Corisande's maid came to me, and asked me to come at once to her mistress.

"Madame is seriously indisposed," she said. "She is suffering from a *migraine*, and is unmanageable. She will not eat, yet she desires breakfast. She knows not what she wants, and yet she rings for me every other minute, and is as cross as thunder."

"Did she send for me?" I asked.

"No, mademoiselle. But last time Madame was ill she liked to have you with her, and said you soothed her nerves. So if you would be so kind, mademoiselle. I am sure *I* can do nothing with her."

I was scarcely in the humour to soothe Madame's nerves, but I

followed Justine to her room, feeling a faint satisfaction in the thought that perhaps I should be enabled to heap coals of fire on the head of my pitiless adversary.

Lady Corisande's room was darkened, that the light should not hurt her eyes, and she did not hear me enter, or take any notice when I quietly took up my position in an armchair at the foot of the bed, ready to attend to the sufferer should she mention a desire for anything.

Madame's migraine was generally a sign that she was ill-tempered or disappointed about something. But to-day she really appeared to be suffering physically as well as mentally, for every now and then I could catch a deep-drawn sigh, and a murmur of:

"Ah! my poor head. Who is there that cares how I feel?"

Did, then, this strange woman, who could be so charming and loveable, and yet at the same time so selfish and despotic, sometimes crave for a love and sympathy that was not hers, as other women crave? Perhaps M. le Comte's estimate of her character was a true one, and she was more to be pitied for her capricious temperament, than disliked for her unreasonable follies. At all events I tried to think so; and told myself that under the tenderness and goodness of her future husband her character would soften and develop until she was worthy to be loved even by him.

"Ah! well," I heard her mutter; "I am getting to be an old woman now and a fool. Bah! How ridiculous it is to be sure."

Then she lay back exhausted, complaining now and again of the pain in her head, and of her loneliness and uselessness. When she became quieter, I rose gently, and steeping a handkerchief in eau-de-cologne bathed her hot forehead, and gently fanned it, hoping that its soothing effect would send her to sleep. For some time she did not move or speak; then she opened her eyes and inquired languidly:

"Is it you, Justine?"

"It is Celia, dear madame. Are you feeling better?"

"A little. But my head is still heavy. How gentle your touch is, child. Do you add sick nursing to your other charms?"

"If my mother is ill, or Aunt Rebecca, it is I who nurse them. But it is mamma who has taught me how to do it. If any of us are in pain it is always she who takes care of us, and comforts us."

"Happy child, to be so loved. I have no one—no one."

"Oh, yes, madame. You have so many. It is only your head that makes you feel sad. Everyone is fond of you; you do not need to be told that."

"Yes—they were—until *you* came!" she cried vehemently. "And you have stolen two hearts from me already."

"I have not," I said quickly. "It is unfair to say so."

"You cannot deny it. First there was Lord Everril; and now there is M. le Comte. It is preposterous! And yet you can come and talk to me as if you were innocent. Impertinent!"

"It is not true," I exclaimed hotly, all the pent-up resentment of the last few days surging up within me. "And if it were true—what of it? Do you want everything? Do you grudge me the smallest crumb of comfort? What can you want with M. le Comte, when you have—Charlie?" Then I paused aghast at my audacity. As for Lady Corisande, I really believe she thought a thunder-bolt had fallen, to judge from her expression of intense amazement.

I have since learnt from experience, that with domineering natures it is by no means always a soft answer that turneth away wrath; but that, on the contrary, a spirited rejoiner will often have the effect of scattering their pride and anger like chaff before a strong wind.

But in those days I had not discovered this peculiarity, and the least that I expected was to be turned out of the house then and there, and left to find my way home as best I could.

For fully five minutes, Lady Corisande was silent, her eyes searching my face intently.

Then she said, quite meekly:

"Forgive me, Celia. I was unjust. But, after all, you must allow that my suspicions are not entirely unprovoked. You certainly did—*try*—to win Charlie's affections; that is now past and over. But now—though I will not say you are entirely to blame—is it not a fact that M. le Comte is paying marked attentions to you?"

"No, madame," I said, with difficulty concealing my amusement. "Far from it."

"Yet he is always running after you. When I see you together I cannot help seeing that there is something between you. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps. Yes, he is very kind to me."

"And he talks confidentially to you?"

"Yes. He has certainly confided things to me."

"There! I thought so," and her voice trembled. "I have known him for years, and yet he never gets beyond bare civilities; and to you, whom he hardly knows, he takes his confidences. Do not be afraid. I am not angry. It is only that you are charming, whilst I am an eccentric old idiot, full of foolish fancies. Old? Ah! yes, that is the truth."

With a sudden impulse I went and knelt by her side, and stroking one of her beautiful white hands, spoke to her just as I should have done to one of the children at home.

"It is true that he confides in me, madame, and talks to me a great deal. But when he talks it is always of you; what he confides to me are his hopes that some day you will care for him; his conversation is of nothing but the 'adorable Corisande.' You see that it is you who have all the love, and I that have none."

"You are a good girl, Celia," she exclaimed. "If I have seemed cruel to you, remember that it could not be helped. And, after all, you do not seem to be unhappy; and recollect that you have many

years before you, whereas I am on the brink of old age. No—do not contradict me. Perhaps I shall not see you again before you leave on Monday. In case I do not, here is a little parting gift, as a token of forgiveness on both sides. If it—that is my engagement—is arranged before you go, you must come and wish me joy, as a proof that you bear me no ill-will. Good-bye, Celia. You are a dear, good little thing, and I shall not forget you."

Then, to my surprise, she put her arms round my neck and embraced me, French fashion, on both cheeks.

I took the little pearl and diamond ring she held out to me, made my farewell as gracefully as I could under the circumstances, and left her, marvelling more than ever at the contradictory nature which was, in some respects, so forgiving and generous.

To-morrow all would be at an end; and then good-bye to Charlie for evermore, and home again to the boys and my mother, and good old Aunt Rebecca.

CHAPTER VIII.

LED TO THE SACRIFICE.

It might have been expected that my spirits should regain their old serenity as the time drew near for me to leave Brantwood; and yet, strangely enough, that last Sunday found me more sad and desolate than I had felt on any other day. The life that I was going back to would never be what it had been in the old light-hearted days before I had committed the folly of falling in love with a man who could never be anything more than a formal acquaintance to me. And though I knew, in my heart, that there was no hope for me, so long as I remained within reach of him, I clung, against all reason, to a desperate belief that by some miracle things would be made right for us even yet.

At least I must look on his face once more, if only to see if he were happy; if my sacrifice had been worth making; if he had forgotten me and the love he had once professed for me.

I knew that if Lady Corisande and her friends went to church they must pass under the window of my room; and long before there was a chance of seeing them I was at my post, waiting to take a stolen glance at Charlie for the last time; and, I am sorry to say, sometimes finding my sight quite obscured by a blinding mist of tears.

But about eleven o'clock my patience was rewarded. I heard approaching voices and footsteps, and presently the whole party passed under my eyes. First, bearing a huge bible and prayer book, and escorted by an old gentleman, came Lady Everril, followed by two tight-laced and decorous young women whom I supposed were her daughters. Next came Madame, with Charlie on one side and M. le Comte on the other.

I thought Charlie looked rather cross, but when Lady Corisande

turned and whispered something to him, his face brightened, and his whole manner underwent a change from sullen gravity to sudden delight. She nodded, smiled, blushed, as he kissed her hand with irrepressible enthusiasm; and together they passed on into the sunlight—leaving me, weeping alone in the shadows.

However, it was only what I had expected, and I managed to control myself into a strained calmness, now that the blow had actually fallen with all its weight.

No doubt I should soon be sent for to pay my respects and make my congratulations, and until that ordeal was over I was determined to show an indomitable courage and fortitude. Time enough after that to break down and give way to the weakness and folly of useless longings and regrets. But, all the same, I thought it was cruel of Lady Corisande to have insisted on that. What benefit would my good wishes bring to her? I should, indeed, as M. le Comte had said, be like a victim brought to the sacrifice. Still, there was some faint recompense in the knowledge that I had acted for the best; and when I saw Lady Everril's kind, high-bred face, and the gentle ones of her daughters, I felt glad that I was not the cause of trouble and annoyance to them.

About four o'clock that afternoon, Justine brought me a little note that ran as follows:

"DEAREST CELIA,—All is settled. I am the happiest woman in the world. Will you let by-gones be by-gones, and come to us and wish us joy? CORISANDE."

"Tell her I will come," I said, turning quite cold and faint. "I will be there in a few minutes."

The maid paused uneasily, glancing curiously at me.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle?" she asked. "You are white like snow, and you have saucers round your eyes black as coals. May I fetch you some sal-volatile?"

"No, no. It is nothing. It is only that I am sick to death of being pent up here. Where is Lady Corisande?"

"In the garden, mademoiselle. They are all in the arbour. And I am sure," she added compassionately, "that company will do mademoiselle good. It is not right for the young to be always alone."

Slowly I crept down stairs, and as slowly walked down the long, rose-bordered path which led towards the arbour where Lady Corisande awaited me.

I had caught a glimpse of myself in the long mirror at the foot of the staircase, and saw a white face with drooping lips, and eyes shining out of great dark shadows. I was ashamed to be seen like that, and though I rubbed my cheeks to bring some colour to them, I knew that my appearance would betray my feelings, no matter how firmly I strove to conceal them.

The test was too hard for me; and suddenly I came to a standstill, and flinging my arms round one of the rose-trees, buried my face in my hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

All the grief and longing of my love seemed to rush over me just then. The future was so dreary, so endless, so hopeless, without him. I could not bear to think that perhaps we should never meet again, and that if we did we should only be Lord Everril and Miss Random to each other; not Charlie and Celia, the boy and girl whose hands and lips had met one golden day in a little room in a London street, and who had been so radiant, so happy, so hopeful.

"Oh, Charlie, why did you tell me you loved me, if it was of no use?" I sighed, as I lifted my doleful face and walked slowly on. "If only you had never spoken to me—never made me think that mamma and the children were not the whole world to me."

When I came within sight of the arbour, I saw that Lady Corisande, Charlie, with his mother and sisters and M. le Comte, were all there watching for me. When I drew near, Lady Everril rose and planted a solemn, maternal embrace upon her son's cheek—an example which the two girls followed with little pecks of sisterly affection; which sudden demonstration appeared slightly disconcerting and embarrassing to Lord Everril. Then they sailed out of the arbour, each giving Lady Corisande's hand a congratulatory squeeze as she passed; and when I came up, shy and trembling, I found myself alone with Madame and the two gentlemen.

There was a moment of awkward silence. Charlie was intent upon slaughtering some innocent flies that buzzed round his hat; Madame looked agitated, and kept making hasty little dabs at her eyes with a lace pocket handkerchief. But presently she cleared her throat, raised her head and began, in a half-hesitating way:

"I have sent for you, Celia, to—to tell you of my great happiness. I am sure you will—wish me joy—and sympathise with me, and—forgive all that is past."

"Yes, dear madame," I said, dazedly. "I wish you all joy, and cannot express to you how—glad ——"

I paused, unable to go on. A mist rose before my eyes, through which I saw only Charlie's face, indistinct and vague. My hands fell to my side, my breath came in little suppressed sobs. Had they no pity? Was not the sacrifice over yet, to which the poor little victim had been brought so helplessly, so forlornly?"

"She does not understand," broke in M. le Comte's voice. "Poor child! Do you not see how piteous are her eyes? Corisande, you are misleading her. Listen to me, Célie. It is all well now; our adorable Madame has consented to make me the most fortunate of men. And as for you—*voilà!*"

And before I could realise what had happened, Charlie was at my side, holding both my hands, and smiling down at me with a world of love in his blue eyes.

"Yes, at last," he whispered; "it has all come right, my brave Amaryllis. You have tried to escape from me, but it was no use; and now you shall *never* leave me, come what may."

"O, madame," I cried; "what does it all mean?"

It was easily explained.

A few jealous pangs caused by M. le Comte's artful little ruse, had shown Madame that, instead of being content with the "angel" Charlie, she had at last met with her master, and was honestly in love with the good little Frenchman who had wooed her in so novel a fashion.

With a generosity as unreserved as her previous selfishness, she acknowledged that she had acted with lamentable folly and vanity, and begged us to forgive and forget. Further, she hinted that she meant to provide handsomely for Charlie during her life-time, and to make him heir to all the Everril estates; which—as Charlie afterwards observed ungratefully—was no more nor less than her duty.

"And as for you, Celia," she ended, "I must thank you—it was you who showed me my folly. I have seen your note to Charlie, and he told me of your meeting in the wood. Good, loyal child. The best I can wish you," she added, smiling through her tears, "is that Charlie will be more amiable to you than he has been lately to the rest of us. He has been unbearably rude and cross and proud. My dear, can you ever forgive me?"

"Madame, dear madame!" I cried, almost foolish with happiness. "It is too good to be true."

"Not a bit of it," said Charlie, a little defiantly. "If I had not had *you*, Celia, I would have had no one. Did you all take me for a fool?"

Which speech contained the last reproach he ever made to Lady Corisande; and, perhaps, on the whole, it was not unmerited.

She had stepped beyond the boundaries of even an eccentric caprice, and the results might have been tragical. As it was, all turned into comedy. Her acknowledgment of her faults and errors was so frank and sincere that it was impossible to bear her ill-will, and we were all willing to let the story die a natural death and be buried in oblivion.

"All ends in smiles and joyousness," said eloquent M. le Comte, as we—two happy pair of lovers—parted, on the very warmest terms of friendship. "My pretty Celia has come to the sacrifice; but it is as a *willing* victim to be sacrificed on the Altar of Hymen."

KATHERINE CARR.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

HOW I AND MY SKETCHES WERE NEARLY DROWNED.

By N. Chevalier.

IT must be true that distance lends enchantment to the view; else how can one explain that, across the hazy distance of some twenty years, we look even with complacency on an event that might have put an end to one's very existence?

I can relate with comparative calmness now the narrow escape I had from a watery grave, when, after four months' hard work in the Australian wilds, I was returning home with the precious results of my labour strapped on my back in the fashion of a knapsack.

I was travelling in company with Dr. Neumayer, the present Director of the Observatory at Hamburg. He with his barometers, aneroids, theodolites, and other instruments for scientific observations; I with my sketching apparatus, consisting of two boards forming a sort of portfolio, which contained nearly three dozen large oil sketches.

We were, as I have said, on our return journey, and I was anxious to visit Wilson's promontary; a waste tract lying between Gipps Land and Point Nepeau.

For this purpose I made a détour in the required direction by means of a sailing boat which I chartered for the occasion. My Captain, Mariano by name, was an old salt hailing from the Bay of Naples. He was delighted to have this opportunity of airing his native language once more; not having heard a syllable of it for many a long year. His entire crew consisted of a lad of twelve, a wide-awake chap who did honour even to that young and wide-awake nation, Australia.

How can I ever forget the delightful freedom of life I experienced in that trip! Away from all civilisation and shops, gliding beneath a cloudless sky over the azure sea, which, whether rippled by a gentle breeze or disturbed by majestic waves, presented ever, in combination with the grand granitic coast, endless subjects for a Stanfield or a Hook.

If you want to be free for awhile from the cares of life, to work in your boat, or on the wild sea-shore; if you would be content for your daily diet on the endless combinations produced by a skilful cook like old Mariano—chiefly composed of the results of his daily fishing; if you would be satisfied to stretch your weary limbs on the

deck at night and sleep soundly until sunrise floods you in its glory ; if you would refresh your brush in nature's tints away from all academic conventionalities, then do as I did. Select the murkiest, foggiest, dismallest autumn month of these changeable isles, and transport yourself by means of one of the sumptuous ocean steamers to the coast I visited, there to bask yourself to your heart's content in the brilliant sun of the southern hemisphere.

Laden, as I have before said, with the results of four months of steady work, I followed the track of my companion, who, with his pack-horses, was about a week's journey ahead of me.

At a sheep station belonging to Mr. John Black, at that time possessor of an extensive run on the Darwin River, I obtained the assistance of a young fellow who, for the consideration of half-a-crown, offered to accompany me a few miles down the banks of the stream, which I had to cross as best I could.

It should be mentioned that in those remote days the lucky owners of sheep runs and cattle stations, which extended over miles and miles of grassy plains or downs, had not the remotest desire to effect improvements themselves, or to allow the local government to do so.

Improved communications would only bring intruding neighbours, so that where bridges *might* have been erected for the public benefit, the river still had to be forded at the peril of your life and property.

The width of the Darwin River at the point where it is usually crossed is about the same as that of the Thames opposite Kew Gardens.

My horse, Sancho, had to carry not only my own not very light weight, but all my travelling kit besides, including wardrobe, painting materials, opossum rug, and the two boards containing the sketches. My guide pointed out the place where the river is usually crossed, calling my attention to two posts, one on either side, which marked the spot.

"Is this the crossing?" I asked somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, that's where the horses and cattle go over."

"Is it deep?"

"Well, as to the depth, it varies according to the tide and the weather. But, anyhow, you're all right now, and I must return to my work."

Pocketing his half-crown, he turned his nag homeward, smoking his cutty pipe with great satisfaction.

The reader may wonder why I did not enter upon the hazardous passage in the presence of my guide, but the beauty of the view caused me to pause. There was the bright beach and the calm ocean beyond ; the river mingling its sweet waters with the briny deep ; the banks green enough to delight the heart of a sheep-grower. Poor Sancho stood looking at me appealingly, as if to say : "Why not sketch this lovely spot, and let me have a good rest and a mouthful

of that succulent grass." If you have spent weeks of solitary travelling, with your horse as your only companion, he becomes so endeared to you by his valuable services and wonderful sagacity, that you cannot resist his mute appeal on such an occasion.

My own feelings moreover were quite in accord with those of Sancho, and I at once relieved him of his load: a favour which he acknowledged by immediately taking a roll in the soft, cool grass. What with my work and an occasional indulgence in the excellent sandwiches with which Miss Black had supplied my wallet, the time passed quickly by, and it was getting towards sunset before I again proceeded to saddle my steed.

Carefully arranging the whole gear and buckling my sketching apparatus across my shoulders, I mounted Sancho and cautiously descended the somewhat steep bank where the post indicated the way across.

I had not gone two yards, however, before I was convinced I had chosen the wrong spot. Sancho plunged into deep water, which came up above the saddle flaps. Nothing is more dangerous than altering a horse's course when in deep water, so I let him go a few yards lower down in the hope of finding a more shallow bottom. Old Sancho looked straight at the opposite bank as he always did when danger was ahead, so I again let him have his way.

Alas! a few yards from the bank there was no longer a footing, and we floated off into deep water.

Sancho swam, however, as if he had no weight whatever on his back, and in a few minutes the river was crossed, but not before we had been carried by the current considerably below the spot Sancho had evidently selected as a safe landing place.

Only those who have had the misfortune to be placed in a similar position can conceive the anxiety I felt. My poor beast was struggling with all his might to plant his fore legs upon the loamy bank. Huge masses of it would detach themselves at each fresh effort, and, falling into the water, were swept away by the current.

Baffled and exhausted, Sancho began to sink deeper into the water, in a few seconds we were some distance from the land, and I could only see the ears and the snorting nostrils of my poor horse, who sent up two columns of spray after the fashion of a whale.

There was no time to lose.

The critical moment had arrived, and slipping from my saddle, loaded as I was, I made a desperate effort to swim to shore. How I accomplished the task I do not know; but a few minutes after I seemed to be awakening from a kind of dream, and found myself lying flat on my back on terra firma, with my sketching boards safe under me.

My first anxiety was for my poor Sancho, and starting up, I saw to my intense satisfaction that he had gained the shore and was grazing near at hand on some luxuriant grass. The saddle was still upon his

back, but, alas, for the travelling kit! It had been all swept away There was I, however, safe and sound, and my precious sketches safe also.

As the nearest habitations were some miles away, I was delighted to see two canvas huts at no great distance off. On reaching them I found by the remains of a meal that the occupants must have just gone out.

My chief anxiety now was to ascertain the state of my sketches.

Opening the boards I spread the soaking pictures upon the level grass, an exhibition which seemed to be for the benefit of the innumerable grasshoppers, which, however, found no pasture upon the wet sheets and could do no damage to them.

Imagine, however, the astonishment of two stalwart young Britishers, the proprietors of the tents, who on their return found me busily engaged in getting the sketches into something like order. Luckily the work was not in water-colour, or it must have been damaged beyond repair.

I was most hospitably entertained by my new acquaintances, and, the next morning, provided with a long rope and a pole, and accompanied by one of my entertainers, I repaired to the spot where I and my sketches were nearly drowned. I waded in up to my arm-pits and probed the bottom of the river with the pole for a long time in the hope of recovering my kit; but in vain.

I was informed by my new friends that the two posts which had misled me the day before, and which I considered indicated safety, were placed there by a paternal government to notify that the spot where they were planted was DANGEROUS.

THE MOUNTSEA MYSTERY.

BROWN and I had been at school together, and in due course we both started in the world—he in a bank, I in "the study and practice of the law." I think I may conscientiously say that I stuck fairly well to my work and in due course struggled through the "Pass examination at the Institute."

On the strength of this I felt more than justified in taking a holiday, and it struck me that Brown was the man with whom I should like to spend it, provided he could renounce the bank for a season. By a great stroke of luck, he managed to fit in his leave to suit mine, and everything was arranged, except the comparatively unimportant item of where we were to go. I really did not care whether I went inland or to the sea, and boldly said so when talking the matter over one day. Whereupon Brown, in that decisive way of his, said:

"I tell you what it is, Charteris: we'll go down to Mountsea."

Now Mountsea is a most excellent spot in many ways. Amongst other advantages it possesses the great charm of being very little known and, consequently, inexpensive.

"All right," I replied, glad to have my mind made up for me. And in due course we found ourselves comfortably settled in the quaint little inn of Mountsea.

I can quite conceive the existence of people who would think the life down there "flat, stale and unprofitable." With such I have no quarrel. Let them away to the crowded and conventional seaside resort. But give me a quiet, old-world spot, where the daily paper comes not until the day after to-morrow, and the attitude of Turkey or a meeting of the Emperors is not obtruded upon you with your early muffin.

There is no station at Mountsea. You and your goods and chattels (unless you prefer a walk) are brought from Orfield—the nearest point to which the railway goes—by a sort of glorified market cart, drawn by an interesting old relic once believed to have been of the horse tribe, but whose semblance to that noble genus has been well-nigh effaced by the hand of Time.

The driver, at the period I write of, was an equal curiosity. His age was undoubted, but the date of his birth was shrouded in mystery. People said something about the nineties; but even if he knew himself he never told a soul.

Brown and I used to go down sometimes in the evening and smoke a pipe with old Vickers, and many a strange yarn of his early days did he spin for our especial benefit. He had been at the battle of Trafalgar; and any reference to the great admiral was always

recognised by his slowly rising and taking off his hat, under whatever circumstances the name might be mentioned. He had lost an arm in the service, and had some small pension on which he lived in a cottage at the extreme outskirts of the little village. A widowed daughter lived with him, and assisted the domestic exchequer by taking in washing; so that altogether the old man was able to exist comfortably.

Well, time passed pleasantly enough down at Mountsea. We were both fond of swimming, and the walks in the neighbourhood were lovely; though, as may be supposed, the excitements were few, being limited to the drawing in of the nets in the afternoon and the arrival of the London papers. Nearly every evening there was held a solemn Tobacco Parliament in the bar-parlour of the "Sea Horse," where we were staying, and the events of the past two or three days were discussed with, occasionally, no little warmth—for party feeling ran high, and the affairs of nations troubled the local mind considerably.

But there was yet another attraction at Mountsea. The Vicar, Mr. Carruthers, was a connection of Brown's. He was of a quiet and retiring disposition, and since his wife's death, some years before, had lived in almost absolute seclusion with his only daughter, Dora.

Both Mr. Carruthers and his daughter were most kind and hospitable. Visitors were rare in those parts, which may, to some extent, account for the warmth of our reception. We were at their house a good deal, and met there with such society as the little village afforded.

Mr. Carruthers' only sister, an aged and somewhat eccentric lady, lived, with an old housekeeper as her only servant and companion, at a large, old-fashioned house, known as "The Laurels," standing by itself rather away from the village in the midst of a regular wilderness of garden. Old Mrs. Jevons never left the house, but either her brother or her niece spent an hour or two with her every day. Mrs. Corfe, her housekeeper, was the widow of a coastguardsman, and had lived with her mistress for a very long time. She was a woman of about fifty years of age, and lived as retired a life as Mrs. Jevons herself. She was a tall, thin, gaunt individual of a somewhat austere countenance, with grey hair. She had a rather anxious look about her at times, and this was attributed to the fact that her only son, Simeon, was a wild ne'er-do-well, who had run away to sea when quite a boy. He often visited Mountsea and spent all his time whilst there in lounging about the village, generally in the region of the "Sea Horse." It was rumoured among the gossippers that he was in some way connected with a band of smugglers, who were occasionally heard of in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Jevons had no other relatives excepting a rackety young nephew, supposed to be her prospective heir.

Apart from his extravagant habits, or perhaps on account of them

—for he was generous with his money, when he had any—he was very popular in the village, but he never stayed with his aunt. He appeared in a meteoric manner from time to time, stayed two or three days at the "Sea Horse," and then disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived. Presumably his visits were not made from pure affection; for, though he always spoke very highly of his aunt, we shrewdly suspected that his regard for her and desire to see her were tempered with more sordid considerations, judging from the remarks he made when chatting over a pipe one evening with Brown and myself.

Indeed, we gathered that he and his aunt had had high words on the subject of his reckless expenditure that very day, though their differences were not of so serious a nature as, in his opinion, to imperil his prospects in that quarter. I did not associate so much with him as Brown did, for whenever I could obtain a reasonable pretext (and, I fear, often when I could not) I used to run up to the Vicarage; for the charm of Miss Carruthers' society was not to be resisted. I was passionately fond of music, and Miss Carruthers had an exquisite voice; one of those naturally sympathetic voices which to me are far sweeter than those of your most cultivated artificial singers.

I could conceive no greater pleasure than to sit in the half-light of that low, old-fashioned room, listening, spell-bound, to that sweet voice which thrilled me as no music ever did before or has since.

My classical lore, never extensive, had become very rusty; but Mr. Carruthers had devoted a great part of his leisure to literature; more particularly to Latin; and poor as my abilities were, it seemed to gratify him to chat over his pet subject with someone who, like myself, knew even a little about it. I did not, strange though it may seem, realise that I was gradually but surely falling in love with Miss Carruthers. I tried in a feeble way to persuade myself that it was mainly to enjoy the intellectual pleasure of Mr. Carruthers' society and the charms of music that I went so often to the Vicarage.

One day, Brown and I were returning, late in the afternoon, from a fishing excursion when, just at the outskirts of the village, we saw Charlie Harcourt, Mrs. Jevons' nephew, talking to old Vickers, whom he left directly he caught sight of us.

As he came toward us I was struck by his haggard and careworn look, and remarked upon it.

"Yes," said he, "I have had a good deal of worry lately. Money, as usual, is scarce. In fact, I'm in a dilemma just now and don't see my way out of it."

I did not care to question him as to his private affairs, thinking that if he wished to tell us anything or ask our advice, he would do so. For though Harcourt was always friendly, he was not as a rule communicative as to the nature of his difficulties, and confined himself generally to references to their existence.

We walked along in silence for some time, and then Harcourt suddenly broke out:

"I don't know that you fellows can help me, but I think you would, if you had it in your power. I've been a fool, but it's not entirely my fault. Some months since, I was at a friend's chambers in town one evening, and we were playing cards in a modest way. It was getting rather late, and Harman, our host, said: 'Well, you men, I'm thinking of turning in as I have a case on early to-morrow. But don't give up on my account—Harcourt will look after you.' Just as he was leaving the room, a knock came to the door and we heard him say: 'Desanges! who ever thought of seeing you! Come in and let me have a look at you. Where have you been hiding yourself all these months?' Harman thereupon ushered in a tall, dark, rather handsome man, looking like a foreigner, but who spoke English without a trace of accent, and introduced him to the party. 'Perhaps you'd like to join in?' said Harman, and the visitor assented. 'Under the circumstances,' he added, 'I must not tear myself away.' We resumed our game, finally leaving somewhere in the small hours. I found my way lay in the same direction as Desanges, so we strolled along together. He seemed to have taken rather a fancy to me and we separated with a promise on my part that I would come and see him. I am sorry that I ever did so; for though personally I have always liked him, my present embarrassments are owing to that unfortunate introduction. I saw a good deal of Desanges and, at his instance, foolishly allowed myself to be put up for his club, where play was very high. I never was a gambler, but I liked cards and used to be there night after night. Desanges himself rarely played high, nor did I at first: but thinking to recoup myself for some trifling losses, I plunged a little, and so went from bad to worse, until I am now heavily in debt, with no earthly prospect of being able to pay my I O U's—to say nothing of my bills—excepting from my aunt. She doesn't know the cause of my difficulties, but I have asked her again and again for money, until she told me, when I last made an appeal to her, that it must be a final one and that she neither could nor would afford me any further assistance. This was only what I might have expected, but my necessities compel me, and I am come to make a last attempt, for I am driven to desperation. If she won't help me, there is only one alternative before me; for I cannot go on as I am."

We tried to cheer him, but it was of little use, and as he left us he said "Well, I daresay the next time we meet it will be at my own inquest, if I can't manage to tide over this difficulty. If I do, I swear I'll never touch a card again."

From what Harcourt told us, it did not seem as though things were so serious as he imagined, for his more pressing debts only amounted to some two or three hundred pounds. Still he appeared to have exhausted every other source, for neither Brown nor myself had either the means or the inclination to advance him the money.

Knowing how fond his aunt was of him, we concluded he was

taking too gloomy a view of the position, and made sure that he would be able to overcome her determination, as this was to be positively the last time he meant to trouble her. I think he had quite determined to settle down to work at his profession—that of an engineer—at which he was really clever; for his experiences of the last few months had been such as to turn him against cards for ever.

So we thought no more about the matter, and after dinner strolled down to the beach, where we sat and smoked, watching the broad track of silver moonlight stretching away to the horizon, and the bright beams from the lighthouse, which we could just discern far along the coast, until I, at least, felt myself becoming quite sentimental.

However, it presently became rather prosaically chilly, so we turned towards home.

As we drew near to the "Sea Horse," we saw quite an imposing crowd at the door, a most unusual sight at that hour of the evening. There was evidently some cause of excitement afoot, and we were not long in learning the facts.

Stated briefly, though, as may be supposed, there was a good deal of conflicting evidence about the details, some person or persons had entered Mrs. Jevons' house, and had made off with a considerable sum of money, leaving the old lady in a very dangerous condition. She had been found by her housekeeper, lying on her sitting-room floor with a very severe wound in the head and perfectly unconscious. Her desk, which was known to have contained a large sum in notes, had been burst open and the whole of the money had been abstracted.

Brown and I looked at each other and were silent. I don't think either of us accused Harcourt of having committed such an outrage; but, knowing what we did, the thought, not unnaturally, passed simultaneously through our minds, and we hastened at once to make further enquiries.

We knew the doctor slightly, having met him at Mr. Carruthers' house two or three times, and on our way to the vicarage we encountered him. He confirmed the story we had heard, and informed us that though he had slight hopes of Mrs. Jevons' recovery, it would be some time before she would be able to speak of what had occurred. In fact, he feared, from the nature of the injury, that it might be months, for an attack of brain fever was imminent.

As I have explained, the only other occupant of the house was Mrs. Corfe, the old housekeeper, and she, from what we could gather, was in her own room, quite away from the scene of the crime at the time it must have happened. The robber, or robbers, doubtless effected their entry by the back of the house, through a French window leading on to the lawn, close to which it was Mrs. Jevons' custom to sit in the long summer evenings. The night being very warm, she had presumably left the window open; and the generally accepted theory was that she had been sitting, as usual, in her arm-

chair when the thieves arrived, and they, in order to avoid being disturbed, had taken the rough and ready way of knocking the poor old lady on the head.

The crime, so it was reported, had been discovered by Mrs. Corfe going into the room, as was her habit, to enquire if her mistress required anything before going to bed. Immediately upon the discovery of the outrage the police had, of course, been sent for, and after a preliminary survey of the premises, a detective from Scotland Yard was telegraphed for: the local talent being considered scarcely equal to so important an enquiry.

By the early train next morning, Mr. Joseph Winter of the Metropolitan Police Force arrived.

Now this gentleman was by no means an ordinary individual. No one would have taken him for a member of his distinguished profession, for he, so far as appearances went, in no respect carried out the traditions of that branch of the force of which he was so bright an ornament. He was rather below the average height, and with his ruddy colour and jovial manner looked far more like a well-to-do farmer than a detective. But there the resemblance ceased. For when you looked more closely at him, there was evident a quiet confidence in his own powers; and you felt, almost indescribably, that here was a man of keen observation of human nature, and one who could read your very thoughts almost before they took shape in your own mind.

On his arrival, he proceeded to the "Sea Horse," where he had a hasty meal, during which he chatted with the landlord—a very communicative man—whose endeavours to find out who his guest was were wholly unsuccessful. After many fruitless attempts, the worthy host broke out at length:

"But may be you'll be down here for the fishing, sir? There's a lot of gentlemen come to stop at this house for that; and though I says it, I know every inch of the neighbourhood, and can tell you the best streams better than anybody. Why, there was a gentleman staying here only last week as took a three-and-half-pound trout out of Squire Benham's lower stream; and they do say as there's a fish there as scales nigh ten pounds only a-waitin' for some one to offer him a fly to his liking."

"Fishing's all very well for those with time and opportunity, but I'm a busy man just now, Mr. Landlord, and can't manage it. Still, if you'll have a nice half-pounder for my breakfast to-morrow, I won't say but what I'll undertake to make it look pretty foolish before I've done with it."

"Well, sir, I'll see what I can do for you. There's a sight of fish in poor Mrs. Jevons' ground. But there—the place is in such an upset after last night."

"Why, what's happened there?" enquired Mr. Winter.

"Law bless me, sir!—But of course you couldn't know, though.

Why, they found the old lady lying on her own sitting-room floor, more than half dead, and thousands of pounds in bank notes taken out of her desk."

"Well, and do they know or suspect who's done it?"

"No, sir; no. The police down here don't seem to have many ideas about it; and they've been and shut up the rooms, so they say, a-waitin' for a detective from London. But, you know, he won't get here till to-morrow, I don't expect, and by that time the thieves 'll have got off, if they haven't already. Now, between me and you, sir, there was a young man down here yesterday, as is the nephew of old Mrs. Jevons, and he was awfully hard up, as I knows myself, and I have heard it said as how as he aint wholly unconnected with this business—but there aint no proof whatsoever against him as I knows of."

"And is he here now?" asked Mr. Winter, finishing his last mouthful.

"No, sir; no. Nobody's seen anything of him since about nine o'clock last night."

"Well, good morning, landlord. I've got some things to see to in the village, so I must be off."

With these words Mr. Winter rose, and putting on his hat started off for the Laurels. When he arrived, there were still a good many loiterers trying to get a glimpse of the premises, which were, however, jealously guarded by the police. He soon obtained an entrance, and proceeded to inspect the apartment in which the outrage had been committed. This had been left exactly as it had been found, and the policeman in charge explained to Mr. Winter the way in which Mrs. Jevons had been discovered.

"Well, now," said Winter, "I must examine the place thoroughly. First, let us look outside the window. You say that this was found open?"

"Just so; and we can see slight marks of a man's foot outside, although the ground is rather hard."

"Very good," said Winter, after he had examined the almost imperceptible footprints; "now let us look inside again. The desk was found like this, burst open, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and this knife we found on the floor was evidently used to do it with, as it fits these marks exactly."

Mr. Winter quietly put the knife in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "let us look at the desk. Here are some account books. Ha! what is this? Here is an entry showing that she must have had nearly £1,700 in the desk, for the receipt of the amount is only dated the day before yesterday, unless she had sent it over to the bank at Orfield, which we can easily ascertain. However, there is nothing more of any importance in that. H'm! here is a pocket-book. Let's look through this. Well," said he, after glancing into it and slipping it into his pocket, "we'll look through that presently."

Anyone acquainted with Winter's method of procedure would have readily inferred that he had seen something of unusual significance in this pocket-book.

"Come," said he, suddenly turning the subject, "with what implement do you suppose the blow was struck?"

"There is the difficulty," said Jones, the policeman. "So far as we have seen, there is nothing in the room with which it can have been done."

"Well, and what does the doctor say about the wound?"

"I have not heard yet."

"Never mind," said Winter. "Let's see what else is to be found."

There were several drawers and cupboards open, and their contents scattered about, though nothing else seemed to have been taken; for some silver spoons in one of the sideboard drawers had been left; so that it was clear that the object of the robbers had been to obtain ready money. When Winter had taken notes of everything they had found, they were leaving the room, when they encountered the doctor coming down the stairs.

"Can you spare me a moment, sir?" asked the detective. "My name is Winter, and I have just come down from Scotland Yard to investigate this business."

"Certainly," replied the doctor. "Shall we go in here?" indicating the door of the dining-room. When they had entered, Winter began:

"Now, sir, may I ask if you can form any opinion as to how the blow was struck?"

"As far as I can see, it must have been inflicted with some blunt weapon, most likely a stick, or the butt end of a revolver. The blow must have been repeated, for there are three distinct wounds, either of which would have been sufficient to cause insensibility; and although I do not think her life is in immediate danger, the shock to a lady of that age—she is nearly eighty—has been very serious. I think that it would be injurious, and possibly fatal, to question her at present. She is just conscious of what is going on, but has not spoken yet, and I am afraid that the slightest excitement might produce a fatal result."

The interview ended and Winter started off for the village telegraph office. On his way back, he entered the grounds of the Laurels through the shrubbery at the bottom of the garden just as I had called to inquire how Mrs. Jevons was progressing. Brown, unfortunately, had been obliged to return to town that morning, much against his inclination, but he begged me to keep him informed of all the events which were taking place at Mountsea.

As I was turning to go down the steps, Winter made his appearance, and although I had not seen him before, I at once, knowing that a detective had arrived, concluded that it was he.

My curiosity was aroused by observing that he carried a peculiar

stick in his hand, one which belonged to Harcourt, and which I had frequently noticed in his possession. I, perhaps rather abruptly, addressed him.

"Excuse me, sir, but may I ask where you found that stick? I believe it belongs to a friend of mine."

"Indeed," said he. "It seems rather too valuable to be lying about in a shrubbery. I should advise your friend to take more care of it in future. Would you mind telling me his name?"

"Not at all. Charles Harcourt. He is a nephew of Mrs. Jevons', and though I am not very intimate with him, I have met him pretty frequently in the last few weeks. By-the-bye, am I right in assuming that you are from Scotland Yard?"

"Quite right, sir. I suppose you are a friend of the family and may be able to render some assistance in clearing up this mystery."

"My name is Arthur Charteris," I replied. "I know Mrs. Jevons slightly, and need not add that my services, such as they are, are at your disposal."

"Thank you, sir," returned he. "Would you mind telling me when and where you last saw this Mr. Harcourt, and under what circumstances?"

I thereupon gave him an account of the conversation which Brown and I had had with Harcourt the previous evening, to which he listened very attentively, occasionally putting a pertinent question.

"Well," said I, when I had finished, "you don't think him capable of such a crime, surely?"

"I don't know yet what to think, my dear sir, but there is a good deal in what I have heard to make me very anxious to see this young man. Do you know where he is?"

"Nothing, so far as I know, has been seen or heard of him since he left me last night; but I've no doubt he went back to town by the night mail, after leaving this house, for I know he wished to return as soon as possible. Poor fellow! How this terrible news will upset him."

"I expect it will," said Winter sententiously. "Do you see the knot of this stick?" handing it to me as he spoke.

I started, for it bore a dark red stain. Looking full at Winter, I saw what was passing through his mind.

"Blood," said he. "There's not a doubt about it, and I don't think we need search very far to find out whose it is. The blow, there can be little doubt, was struck with this stick. Will you walk down with me to the doctor's? He will settle the point at once."

"By all means," said I; and we soon found ourselves in his surgery. He confirmed our suspicions, and Winter and I returned to the inn.

"What are you going to do next?" I inquired. "Wire off a description of Harcourt to Scotland Yard, I suppose?"

"Yes, if I knew he was in London. I think you said you didn't know his address?"

"Unfortunately I don't, though I can of course obtain it from the Vicar. But if he went up by the night mail, which is pretty certain, if he went at all, old Vickers must have driven him over to Orfield. I'll go over and see him at once."

"Very well," returned Winter; "we'll go on and interview him after leaving the telegraph office."

We found old Vickers diligently hoeing potatoes in his little strip of garden, and at once learnt from him that, as we had expected, he had driven Harcourt across to the station late the night before. On further inquiry we elicited the information that he had been the only passenger from Orfield, and had paid the old man handsomely for his trouble. There was nothing more to be learnt from him, except that Harcourt had been very anxious to be in time for the train, and that he had joined old Vickers at the cross roads just beyond the Laurels in a state of great agitation. As we were returning to the "Sea Horse" we were met by the telegraph boy, who handed Winter a telegram, which he hastily opened.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "this is better than I had anticipated."

"Well, but they cannot have had time to arrest Harcourt yet?" I said.

"No; but do you know that in searching Mrs. Jevons' desk this morning, I came across this note-book," producing one from his pocket, "which contains a memorandum of the numbers of the notes, paid to her only the day before yesterday by a farmer in the neighbourhood, in discharge of a mortgage. I telegraphed at once to stop the notes, and this message is to say that two of them for £100 each have been presented in London this morning."

"Do they know who presented them?"

"The telegram does not say, but I expect I shall hear again in the course of the day."

There was nothing further to be done now, so I turned my steps to the Vicarage, while Winter returned to the inn for some lunch.

At the Vicarage I found them much upset by last night's occurrences, as might be expected. Miss Carruthers was very indignant that any shadow of suspicion should have fallen on Harcourt. "For," said she, "he may be a little wild and thoughtless, and I know he is rather extravagant in his habits, but he could never have sunk to the level of a crime to obtain money."

I hastened to reassure her, adding that though some said that Harcourt was in some way connected with the outrage, I could see absolutely no real proof against him. Still, as Mr. Carruthers said, to an outsider the circumstances were suspicious. I took tea with them, and after a stroll round the garden, left them, promising to let them know immediately, should any fresh details come to light. On my return to the inn I found Winter standing at the door.

"Shall we take a stroll along the cliffs?" he asked. "I want a talk with you, and you may be able to give me some suggestions."

I felt flattered at being taken into his confidence, and we walked away together.

As soon as we were quite clear of the village Winter began:

"While you have been away I have been up to the Laurels, and have seen Mrs. Corfe. Now between you and me there was something not quite straightforward about her manner when I questioned her, and I have an idea that she knows more about this business than she pretends to. She says that at about a quarter past seven, Harcourt called at the house, and went into Mrs. Jevons' sitting-room. She did not see him leave, as she was in her own room at the top of the house, and neither heard nor saw anything till about a quarter to ten, when she went into the sitting-room and found her mistress on the floor. I don't half like her manner, and we must watch her carefully. She cannot be interested in screening Harcourt, for from what I gather he was never a favourite of hers. Could she have been present when ——"

Suddenly we looked at each other. The same thought occurred to us both at the same moment.

"Mrs. Corfe must have known that the money was in the house. Could *she* have done it? And yet here we have the presentation of these two notes this morning. There is something I can't quite fathom here yet. Well, let us get back; perhaps I shall find another telegram waiting for me."

As he had anticipated, there was one saying that the authorities had communicated with the customer, to whose account at the bank the notes had been paid, and found that he had received them from Harcourt, but they had hitherto been unable to discover the latter's whereabouts.

This threw an altogether different light on the matter; and reluctant as I was to believe Harcourt guilty, I felt that things now looked very black indeed for him. However, nothing further could be done that night, and as I didn't wish to be inconveniently questioned at the Vicarage, I remained at the inn.

Next morning's post confirmed the two telegrams, and added that they were on the scent and hoped to arrest Harcourt in the course of the day. In fact, another telegram arrived just after, stating that they had found him and that he would be brought down to Orfield by the mid-day train.

Meanwhile, Winter's movements were most mysterious. He disappeared immediately after he had received the telegram, and I saw nothing further of him that day.

I am afraid that my desire to assist in the discovery of the authors of the outrage was not my only inducement to remain at Mountsea after Brown had left. The fact was I was determined to know the best or the worst with regard to Miss Carruthers. I had some letters to write during the morning and after lunch, as it was too early to go down to the Vicarage, I started off for a ramble along the cliffs. I

had not gone far when I saw in the distance a figure which seemed to me to bear a strong resemblance to that of Mr. Joseph Winter. But whoever it was, he disappeared before I could come up with him, and I continued my walk in silence, pondering over the late strange events and trying to make up my mind to risk the fatal question.

On my return to the village, I took heart of grace and went up to the Vicarage, hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst. It was, perhaps, scarcely a fitting opportunity considering everything: but I thought I would risk it, as I had to return to town very shortly: and if poor Mrs. Jevons were to succumb to her injuries, as I feared, I might have to postpone matters indefinitely.

Why should I attempt to describe what has so often been told before, and will be again? The details, of course, vary in every case, but the general tenour of the proceedings is much the same. I found both Mr. and Miss Carruthers at home, but the Vicar begged me to excuse him for half an hour, as he had some parish business to attend to. So I thoughtfully allowed him to retire to the congenial atmosphere of his study, with scarcely a feeling of regret.

I fancy Dora had some instinctive notion of what was coming, for she did not appear utterly astonished when I proceeded to unbar the floodgates of my eloquence. I think the astonishment was rather on my side, at the amount I had to say and the comparative ease with which I said it. The ordeal was soon over; and, such is human nature, I wondered at my diffidence, and thought I would go through all the past weeks of doubt and anxiety ten times over, only to hear Dora tell me once again that she loved me. I could not wait until the Vicar's return, so went and bearded the lion in his den. He received me most kindly, and I found, to my relief, that my proposal was one for which he was not wholly unprepared.

"I have not entirely lost my powers of perception," said he, with a kindly smile, "though I have spent most of my life in a country vicarage."

He gave his consent at once; and happily, having frequently talked over and consulted with him as to my position and prospects, I had no need to enter into prosaic details of ways and means.

I dined at the Vicarage that evening, and as it was getting dusk, Dora and I walked round the garden, building "castles in Spain,' and indulging in all sorts of speculations about the future.

Whilst we were in the garden, a messenger arrived from the Laurels, saying that the doctor had been again, and had pronounced the old lady much worse. In fact, he now entertained no hopes of her recovery.

Mr. Carruthers and Dora immediately started to see her, and I went back to the inn. There I found a note from Winter, saying that he had gone over to Orfield to interview Harcourt, and would not be back that night; and if any telegram came for him, he begged me

to open it, and let him know at once should it be anything of importance. With this responsibility on my shoulders, I felt that I could not stay far away, so I remained at the inn, reading.

At about half-past nine I received a message from Dora at the Laurels, saying that Mrs. Jevons had breathed her last about an hour ago, and that she (Dora) had "something dreadful" to tell me. Would I come up to the Laurels at once? To this request I could only accede, and hurried thither in great anxiety.

I found her in tears, and she at once drew me into the dining-room, and shut the door.

"Oh, Arthur!" she exclaimed, "do you know what my aunt's last words were?"

Of course I did not.

"Just before her death," she continued, 'she recovered complete consciousness for a moment, and there, in the presence of my father, the doctor and Mrs. Corfe she murmured, 'Tell Charlie I forgive him.' Oh! isn't it dreadful!" and she burst out crying again.

I did my best to comfort her, and tried to assure her that Mrs. Jevons' words probably had no reference to the crime; but in my heart I could not help feeling that this was only an additional link in the chain which was binding poor Harcourt. I think Dora must have fully realised this, for, when we parted for the night, she was sadder than ever.

Next morning, Winter put in an appearance at the early hour of six, and told me that the Carrutherses, Mrs. Corfe, old Vickers and myself would have to attend at the Orfield police station at eleven o'clock that morning. I told him of Mrs. Jevons' death, and of her dying words, and to my great relief found that he did not consider it absolutely necessary that Dora should go over to Orfield. I hastened to the Vicarage, but they were not up yet; so I left a note for Mr. Carruthers, begging him to bring Mrs. Corfe over to Orfield in old Vickers' cart, for I meant to walk with Winter.

After breakfast, the detective said he must see Mrs. Corfe for a few minutes, as he had some questions to ask her. So he walked up to the Laurels, and, on his return, we both started for Orfield.

I am not going to enter into the details of the magisterial inquiry which was held that morning. Had not the law been my own profession, perhaps I might have delighted in wearying you with technical points, and giving you the proceedings verbatim. But as it is, I will content myself with saying that the combined evidence of Mrs. Corfe (who, of course, must needs drag in poor Mrs. Jevons's dying words), old Vickers, the detective and my unwilling self—every jot of which told against poor Harcourt—was more than sufficient to authorise the magistrates in committing the prisoner for trial at the assizes, which were to be held in a fortnight's time.

It was a sad evening at Mountsea, as may well be supposed. The two dreadful calamities—her aunt's death and her cousin's com-

mittal—well nigh overwhelmed poor Dora. I remained with her for a day or two till the funeral should take place. We were a mournful party, for I could now feel much more the death of the old lady, owing to her being Dora'a aunt.

The contents of the will surprised us all. Mrs. Jevons was much wealthier than had been supposed, and, with the exception of a small legacy to Mrs. Corfe, she left the whole of her property to be equally divided between her nephew, Charles Harcourt, and her niece, Dora Carruthers.

I returned to town the day after the funeral, and resumed my usual occupation ; and so a week passed slowly by.

During that week I had twice called at Scotland Yard, and inquired for Winter. On the first occasion I was told he was at Portsmouth, and on the second at Dover. My third attempt was on the day before Harcourt's trial was to come off, and this time I found him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, when he caught sight of me. "You're the very man I wanted. No time for explanations now. Go and pack your bag at once, and meet me at Waterloo at 4.23."

"Well, but what am I to ——"

"Go at once, I tell you, and don't waste time."

I knew that I should have to attend at the Leavenshire County Assizes on the following day ; so without further parley, I jumped into a cab to do as I was bid. It was already half-past three, and I had no time to spare ; but I just reached Waterloo in time, and Winter and I found ourselves alone in a carriage. When we had got clear of London, he unbosomed himself as follows :

"From the very first," he began, "I felt quite sure that Harcourt was innocent ; for, if he had committed the crime, he wouldn't have thrown his stick away into the shrubbery, as it was a peculiar one, and would at once be recognised. How it got there I will presently explain to you. Then he knew the ways of the house, more or less, and would not have ransacked all those drawers and cupboards for nothing, but would have been content with the cash. Nor, if he had stolen the notes, would he have been so utterly foolish as to put them into circulation so soon, and in the way almost certain to lead to detection. But my most conclusive point was a knife which was found on the floor, and with which the desk was forced open. It was a knife such as sailors always carry, and I didn't suppose for a moment that it belonged to Harcourt. You will see where this came from, all in good time. You may remember that two days after the murder I disappeared all day long. Well, that knife had given me an idea. I walked along the cliff as far as the coastguard's, and questioned him. As I had expected, he had seen a small lugger waiting about off the coast in a suspicious manner, from eight to ten o'clock on the night of the murder.

"'Do you know whose it was?' I asked him.

"'Well, no, not exactly; but I guessed young Corfe wasn't so far off.'

"'Young Corfe! Who's he?'

"'Oh, him? He's round here now and again, bringing brandy ashore, I'll warrant. He's Mrs. Corfe's son, up at the Laurels yonder.'

"Well, I got more out of the coastguard than I expected, and this last statement of his opened my eyes a good deal. From what I afterwards gathered from the coastguard, I made my way down the side of a ravine and found a cleft in the rock, which he had described to me. I scrambled in with some difficulty. It was a cave, evidently of considerable extent, as I could see even in the dim light. I proceeded for some distance with the aid of a box of matches, and presently I saw a faint glimmer of daylight far ahead. To my astonishment when I reached this point, the cave debouched into what looked like a well; and on examining it I found that it actually was an old well, and if you care to go there and climb up you will, perhaps, be surprised to find yourself in a remote corner of Mrs. Jevons' garden. If I had any doubt now, it was removed when, on the way out, I picked up on the floor of the cave a white silk handkerchief. It had evidently been used to bandage up somebody's arm or leg and it was stained with blood. In the corner were the initials H. J.—Harriett Jevons. Although I questioned Mrs. Corfe most closely, she asserted most positively that she hadn't seen her son lately and didn't know where he was. Still I now had something to go on. I got a description of the lugger from the coastguard and of young Corfe from several people. I also learnt that he *had* been seen in the village, by one person at least, on the night of the murder. These descriptions I telegraphed off to most of the seaport towns along the South Coast. The result was that in a couple of days' time I had a telegram from Portsmouth saying that such a boat had arrived and such a man was on board. I went down at once, but the boat had slipped away the night before. One of the bank-notes, though, was presented in Portsmouth that day, and we traced it to a man answering to Corfe's description. The next I heard of him was at Dover, and I hurried thither accordingly. This time fortune favoured me, and we captured him in a public house of no very reputable character. To my astonishment he confessed to the robbery, and though I showed him that we had a complete chain of evidence against him, I kept from him Mrs. Jevons' death and the fact that he would be charged with murder. It seems that he wanted money; and learning, when he went to see his mother at Mountsea, that Mrs. Jevons had a large amount in bank-notes in her house, he planned the robbery without any intention of doing bodily harm to the old lady. On his entering the sitting-room, however, she, in her fright, proceeded to scream to such an extent that, fearful of being disturbed, he had snatched up a stick—Harcourt's, you know—which was lying on a chair close by, and administered the three blows on Mrs. Jevons'

head, which proved fatal to her. Mrs. Corfe, hearing the screams, hurried down stairs, opened the door and entered the room just in time to see her son strike Mrs. Jevons to the ground. He exchanged some angry words with her, but she could do nothing to restrain him, and after rifling the drawers and cupboards, he espied the desk lying on the table, which he immediately proceeded to force open, in doing which he cut his hand. He felt confident that his mother would not reveal the fact that her own son was the author of the outrage, and so proceeded to escape by means of the well. With regard to Harcourt, it seems that his appeal for money was listened to, for he says his aunt gave him bank-notes for five hundred pounds, after upbraiding him for his extravagance, and on his vowing that this should be the very last time that he would ever come to her for money. By accident he left his stick behind, and then hurried off to meet old Vickers and drive over to Orfield. So now I think we have completed the job, and I expect we shall have very little trouble in getting Harcourt acquitted."

I had listened in astonishment to Winter's narrative, and was congratulating him on the success of his manœuvres, when the train drew up at Orfield. Here Winter remained, and I drove over to Mountsea and hurried up to the Vicarage. They were surprised to see me, and intensely gratified at the news I brought of the arrest of the real murderer.

I stopped at the "Sea Horse" that night, and on the morrow we all drove over to Orfield, and took the train for Oxiter, the county town, where the assizes were to be held.

The result of the trial was as we expected.

Harcourt was acquitted, but it was a severe lesson to him; *he* said a punishment which he well deserved. Mr. Simeon Corfe was afterwards tried on the charge of manslaughter, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

I have little more to add.

The following spring, Dora Carruthers became Dora Charteris, and we are now comfortably settled in the neighbourhood of London. Mr. Carruthers, feeling that he was advancing in life, resigned his living at Mountsea and came to reside with us. Mrs. Corfe disappeared from the neighbourhood, and has not since been heard of. Brown comes to dine with us occasionally. He, too, is married and lives not far off. Charlie Harcourt is still a bachelor, though a reformed one. He seems to prefer a single life, and has, so far as I know, rigidly kept his vow, for he will never take even a hand at whist when he comes to see us. I see Mr. Winter now and again. He still shines in his profession, and has unravelled several far more complicated cases than the "Mountsea Mystery."

SALT WORKING AND SALT SUPERSTITIONS.

By Alexander H. Japp, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

A FEW more words are necessary before concluding our remarks on salt.

The following is a very simple and general description of the process followed in obtaining salt at the Cheshire mines.

First, the blasting of the mine. A shot hole is drilled with an arrow-headed rod of iron some eight feet in length. The hole is cleared of every particle of dust and then charged with several ounces of coarse powder, some salt being laid on the top. A straw filled with fine powder is then placed in the shot-hole, and the charge is fired with a piece of cotton-wick.

In a second or two the charge explodes, and many tons of solid rock-salt are blown outward to a short distance.

These fragments are then collected, placed in baskets and pushed on rails to the mouth of the pit. They are then raised by steam power.

Two qualities of salt result. One called Prussian rock, from its being largely exported to the shores of the Baltic; the other coarse, used chiefly for agricultural purposes. Much of this is sent to Australia, where the land in large areas in some quarters demands its application.

In Cheshire there are constant brine-springs in working, as well as rock-salt mining. To raise the brine various methods are adopted. Not very many years ago, it was raised by human labour: men, half-naked, descending to the pit by stairs, and drawing up the water in leathern buckets. Water-wheels, windmills and horse-power took their place; and these, in their turn, have given place completely to steam.

The brine is pumped up through a series of iron tubes screwed together, and called *trees*. It is then carried across the yard in a wooden trough, fixed to the tops of the *trees*, and emptied into a vast cistern, or reservoir. Here, while it remains unagitated, an iron-grey scum forms on the top, which is filled with bubbles. A quantity of rock-salt is kept in the reservoirs, to ensure the complete saturation of the brine.

This salt-water is now ready for the process of manufacture into table-salt by means of artificial evaporation.

The brine is made to flow through pipes into the evaporating pans. These are large square or circular vessels, made of wrought iron, and supported on brick furnaces, which extend far beneath the pans. Some of these pans are sixty feet long and forty feet wide,

while others are considerably larger even than that. Over furnace and pan is a wooden shed, to keep out all cold air.

The pans being filled with brine, the fires are lighted, and the work of evaporation begins.

After a short lapse of time, a man takes his place on a platform at the edge of the pan. His business is that of "raking." He throws out constantly into the midst of the boiling fluid a long iron rake, with which he draws to the surface of the fluid masses a fine white substance, which had settled at the bottom.

As soon as the brine begins to boil, the salt rises to the surface in a kind of scum, and then, after a short time, it sinks slowly to the bottom, when it is drawn together and lifted out with a large perforated "skimmer," all the brine escaping through the holes as it is being lifted.

The salt is then placed in little wooden tubs, also bored with holes, set round in spaces by the side of the pan.

Having filled a certain number of these tubs, the man *haps*, or smooths, the salt carefully over, and sets the batch on a kind of hurdle, to be conveyed to the drying-room—a long, low chamber, highly heated by flues extending from the furnace. The spaces between the flues are called "ditches," really drains to carry off the water from the tubs. After a certain exposure here the salt becomes thoroughly solid; then it is removed in the oblong blocks in which it is sold.

The production of the different kinds of salt is determined by the degree of heat to which the brine is exposed, and the time thus allowed for the process of detachment from other salts and for crystalisation.

The process we have more particularly described above is that of "lump salt." What is called "Patent Butter Salt"—the finest of all—is made in circular pans, completely covered over; the salt, as it settles at the bottom, being "raked" by a mechanical process of leverage into what is called a "hopper," a kind of square tub, placed at the side of the pan.

"Common salt" is made in pans, which are never heated to the boiling point. "Rough salt" is made from brine just warmed through, and no more. The pans in this case are only cleared about once a week; and the salt, being very coarse in the grain, is much in demand for salting herrings and such things. "Fishery salt" is coarser still: it is only drawn once a fortnight or so, with grains sometimes as much as half-an-inch long. This is entirely used for salting fish. To aid in purifying the salt, a pinch of soft soap or glue s generally thrown into the brine, and the pans are kept always full.

Thus the description of crystals of the salt obtained from the brine varies precisely according to the degree of heat used in the evaporating process. A temperature of 120 degrees will produce bay salt, whereas a temperature of 225 degrees is necessary for pro-

ducing the finest table salt, which, as we have seen, cannot be obtained in open pans. Within this range of temperature all the different forms of salt-crystals are deposited.

The workers have heavy, heating labour and long hours—and many must perform night-work, as the furnaces must be kept up, and the pans never allowed to become exhausted. Most of the workers at the pans are Poles or Germans.

Each evaporating pan in some of the works at Droitwich is, or was recently, attended by four women, two on each side, who lifted the salt from the boiling brine, as it crystallised, and placed it in moulds. When the moisture was sufficiently drained away through the perforations in the moulds at the smaller end, they were removed, and carried into the drying stores, which were always kept at a temperature of from 120 to 160 degrees.

The work of the women began at six in the morning. At that operation each woman was expected to fill seventy moulds, which are formed of stout boards, and to carry the solidified crystal blocks into the drying-store. At one o'clock they had to fill and remove sixty, and at half-past four an additional thirty. As these moulds with their contents weigh from forty to sixty pounds, and sometimes even more, the reader will understand something of the weights these poor women had to carry, and will join with us in the hope that more and more this kind of female labour will give place to lighter and more suitable.

That salt in its pure state does not melt under any circumstances of exposure to air, is proved by many facts.

Salt in its rock form is one of the hardest minerals. It can be cut and carved into the most beautiful shapes. Indeed, in some parts of India there is a considerable industry in making ornamental articles from it—jars, platters, cups and even knives have been made of it. In Poland it is carved into crucifixes, beads, inkstands, and many other articles, even billiard balls. In the mines of Vieliczska —which, as we have seen, are very extensive and very celebrated—there is a statue of King John Sigismund in salt. For a considerable period this statue was at Warsaw, and showed no injury from the changes of climate. We read that in 1698 a chapel to St. Anthony was excavated in the mines, and all the furniture—the pulpit, the pews, the altars, doors, statues and ornamental work—was formed of the beautiful crystal rock salt. The mangers, troughs and stalls for the horses which work in the mines were also formed of it, so that in this case the animals could not possibly suffer from a neglect from which other domestic animals often suffer elsewhere.

Very often people make a great mistake when they use salt to melt snow at their doorways, and fail to remove the liquid mixture, increasing thus the cold temperature of their houses in winter. When salt is mixed with snow, the heat of the crystals becomes latent in passing from the solid to the melted state. The mixture is thus much colder

than melted snow would be of itself. This, indeed, was the mixture called "frigorific mixture," which Fahrenheit used in 1714, when he made his thermometer, as it was then the lowest temperature known —the zero, indeed, of the scale of the thermometer which is now so well known by his name. Since then, however, a greater degree of coldness has been produced by the evaporation of ether and of ammonia, and by the liberation of compressed air.

The statute-books of the world, too, bear good witness to the necessity of salt as food.

Several countries in old days adopted as a punishment deprivation of salt. One of the old laws of Holland ordained as the severest punishment that can be conceived, that certain malefactors should be fed on bread in which there was no salt. The effect, we learn, was horrible and painful in the extreme; and, of course, it was aggravated by the moist climate of the country. The wretched creatures sentenced to this penalty are said to have died the most horrible of deaths, and medical men know that there is a tendency to disease in those who have an aversion, individual or inherited, to salt.

Not only is salt a great and necessary element in the blood, but it is a wonderful aid in exciting the gustatory nerves, and it is also a great assistance to digestion. In the stomach the salt is decomposed into what is called hydrochloric acid, and a soluble sodium salt. The acid is essential to digestion, and the sodium salt is absorbed to sustain the alkalinity of the blood, and to preserve the density of the fluids of the body.

Its antiseptic action, also, should be remembered—its power in preserving flesh from decomposition. Salt-miners and sailors are among the most healthy and robust classes of workers. The amount of salt needed by individuals varies, and it will vary by a slight degree with certain kinds of food, because some foods contain less salt, some more. But half-an-ounce a day may be set down as a safe allowance, always remembering that here there is more safety in excess than in defect, and that moderation may hardly in this case be the golden mean. Any excess the system easily carries off, whereas too little can only have injurious results. Rice and other farinaceous foods demand more salt than any other kinds of food to prevent the appearance of certain diseases—Gastrodynia amongst them—from which the poor Hindus are wont to suffer, through an enforced economy in salt.

Salt, too, is an admirable aperient. Many persons in India take a glass of sea-water every morning. It has also been successfully used in this way in Jamaica and other West Indian Islands. Dr. Priestley found that sprigs of plants and vegetables lived longer and flourished better in water containing two grains of salt to the ounce, but that they speedily died in water containing twelve grains to the ounce. This is quite in keeping with the experience of farmers.

If there is a deficiency of salt in the land, on which more especially serials are grown, then it must be sown in the field.

The place of salt in industry would, however, need a long essay to itself. It is essential in the production of certain glazes for pottery; for improving the whiteness and clearness of glass; for giving hardness to soap; for preventing calcination on the surface of certain metals by protecting them from the air; for improving certain colours; for assays and for certain processes in photography.

Salt is often referred to in Scripture, and there at first it is used as a type of barrenness and desolation; due to the sterile aspect of the salt-plains, on which the early writers would look with no clear scientific knowledge to modify their views. It is very curious, indeed, and instructive, too, to read in Judges ix. 45, that when Abimelech destroyed the city of Shechem, and completely razed the place, he "fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and *sowed it with salt.*"

But more knowledge and attention to the properties of salt in course of time modified (as was most natural it should) the whole conception of it among the Jews, and made it the emblem of health and purity, instead of that of desolation and barrenness and death.

Great stress was laid upon salt in the offerings under the Levitical Law: "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be wanting from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings shalt thou offer salt."

The meaning of our word salt, which is Gothic, has been defined as that which "occasions all tastes," and this was the view which the later Old Testament writers took of it. With them it stood for the symbol of wisdom, giving savour to a man's character. St. Paul, writing to the Colossians, urges that their speech should always be "seasoned with salt," and our Saviour Himself called His apostles "the Salt of the Earth."

Livy paid a fine compliment to Greece, when he called it "Sal gentium," from whence scholars say that the common phrase "Attic Salt," or the wisdom and wit that seasons speech, was derived.

Shakespeare mentions salt some thirty-nine times; sometimes in the ordinary sense, sometimes figuratively. It is very peculiar to notice that he regarded salt as essential to tears, and seems to have had an idea that the deeper the grief the salter the tear-drops. He also knew that salt formed an important part in the economy of the human body, for more than once he speaks of a "salt rheum which offends me."

Very probably it was this idea of the saltness of tears which gave rise to some of the superstitions connected with salt, which are very numerous.

It is thought unlucky to help anyone to salt at table, and the

superstition has given rise to the proverb, "Helped to salt, helped to sorrow." To spill salt also is held to be unfortunate; and when threatened with ill-luck it was a custom in old times to throw salt over the left shoulder. Houses were salted for luck, and salt was invariably put beside a corpse as well as the lighted candles. No wake in Ireland at this day would be considered right without the salt in the plates beside the dead; and in Scotland, long after the era of the reformation, the Church found it very difficult to cast out these practices.

Salt in early times was symbolical of favour and goodwill, and covenants of friendship were ratified by this gift. In the Old Testament even we have the covenant of salt. Among Jews and Greeks and Romans, as well as among less civilised tribes, salt was used in their sacrifices as emblematic of fidelity, and, for some reason or other, it also came to be regarded as a charm against witchcraft and evil influence or fascination. It was all-potent as a protection for children among Roman Catholics before the administration of the rite of baptism. This practice is referred to in many of the old ballads and romances. In a ballad called "The King's Daughter" a child is born, but in circumstances which do not admit of baptism being administered. The mother privately puts the baby into a casket, and, like the mother of Moses, sends it afloat, and, as a protection, places beside it a quantity of salt and candles. One verse of the ballad is:

> "The bairnie she swyled (swathed) in line sae fine,
> In a gilded casket she laid it syne (then).
> Mickle saut (salt) and licht (light) she laid therein,
> 'Cause yet in God's house it hadna been."

The reason that lies at the root of these strange customs is that the evil spirits were held to be kept away by the salt, not being able to come near what Christ had chosen as the symbol of the savour of the earth.

Salt is a symbol of hospitality all over the East. To have eaten of a man's salt means that he is your friend, and to be false to your salt is to descend to the level of a betrayer and a traitor. Among the Arabs, perhaps, this sentiment is carried to the highest pitch.

We have spoken of the taxes on salt. The more fully we come to realise the absolute necessity of salt to life, the more grievous does this taxation appear. Yet, in some parts of India, salt is almost as high as is the price of oatmeal in Scotland. The total cost of a ton of salt, as delivered at the depôt, is only 18*s*. The price which the traders pay, including the duty, is £8 5*s*. in silver. The figures are eloquent of the sufferings which must be imposed on the poor people by this impost, and surely true motives of statesmanship as well as motives of philanthropy should lead to some reform in this respect very soon.

LADY POSTLETHWAITE'S WILL.

"PHILL," said my father, "here's a note from Lady Postlethwaite. She wants to see me this morning, to take instructions for a codicil to her will. I can't go, so you must."

I received the suggestion with sufficient ungraciousness. It upset my plans for a rapid despatch of office work that morning and an afternoon's holiday on the ice at Hendon.

"Lady Postlethwaite doesn't know me," I demurred. "Wouldn't she rather wait till you are better?"

"Bless my soul!" interrupted my father testily. "When did you ever know me to get better? The fit is due, sir! I feel it flying about me at this moment, and here you go aggravating it with your stupid, paltering objections. Do you mean to go, or do you not?"

"Of course I'm going, as soon as I get the address. I only thought of your being her old and confidential friend ——"

"Old friends be ——!" exploded my father, and then I knew it *was* gout. A false alarm made him "bless his soul" occasionally, but nothing short of the real thing ever drove a profane expletive from those God-fearing lips.

I knew my father's visits to his client were solemn undertakings, lasting half the day at shortest, and inwardly resolved to astonish his valued old friend into a more rapid despatch of her affairs, so as to get away before the afternoon waned. I had never seen Lady Postlethwaite. I only knew that she had a large fortune and was much exercised as to its eventual disposal. "Lady Postlethwaite's Will" came round as regularly in my father's diary as quarter day; and about as frequently.

I journeyed in a sulky mood through the frost-fog to the suburban region where "Deodara Lodge" then stood. A smart villa residence with much glass and ornamental shrubbery surrounding it. There was an air of trim luxury, of a costly, quiet sort about the whole place. The little smiling maid-servant who opened the door was the only incongruity. She trotted before me down a warm, hushed hall to a door through which she ushered me and left me alone, as I thought.

The room was rich and sombre, heavy with mahogany, gloomy with damask. A bright fire snapped and sparkled in a marvellously polished steel grate; over the mantelpiece, in a gorgeous gilded frame, hung a portrait of a little grey man in the full splendour of aldermanic robes, and in front of the fire in the depths of a great leathern arm-chair, a little old lady slumbered soundly.

A comfortable, rosy-cheeked old-lady, with greyish-brown curls pinned at each side of her placid little face, a very smart cap,

diamond rings on her plump little mittened fingers, and a satin gown, in the lap of which rested a religious newspaper and a tortoiseshell cat, who opened one sleepy eye as I softly approached over the thick Turkey carpet. The next minute puss's mistress had sprung to her feet bolt upright, and wide awake, and catching the cat deftly with one hand gave mine a cordial shake with the other.

"Mr. Philip Austen! No mistake about that!" she exclaimed. "Eh, but you're like your good father! So you caught me napping. I've done a long morning's work; the hardest in the house I sometimes think; and I'm not so young as I was. Put down that hat and take your coat off. That's better. Now you'll just have a glass of wine and a piece of cake after your journey."

The little maid came in answer to the bell, but I strenuously protested that I could eat nothing, that my time was limited, that I never touched wine in the morning. Lady Postlethwaite looked as honestly disconcerted as if I had been guilty of some breach of etiquette, but beckoned the maid and gave her a bunch of keys and some lengthy and minute whispered directions which I feared referred to luncheon.

I delivered all my father's explanations and apologies.

"An old gentleman crippled with gout! And that's what handsome Phil Austen has come to: the neatest dancer and the finest figure of a young fellow that you could see, once upon a time. A noble pair they made—he and Miss Anne Hooper. Eh, lad, lad! but it's a sad thing to grow old; or it would be, if it weren't for you young ones being left to us!"

She looked at me with such kindly eyes that I felt ashamed of my impatience.

"Did your father send me nothing by you?" she asked.

I gave her a sealed envelope which she opened. It only contained a small key.

"This is a fancy of mine. Look here," she said.

It fitted the lock of a central compartment in a large bookcase that stood in the room. A tall, narrow space between the shelves of books, evidently intended to contain maps or engravings. It was only a few inches in width and the glazed panel of its door looked hardly wider than the slit of a letter box. It was empty save for a long blue envelope tied with fancy ribbon and sealed with a large red seal. She took this out.

"This is my will, you see. I can look in through the glass at it every day if I like and know that it's safe, but I am secured from tampering with it except with the knowledge and consent of your father. That is Sir Josiah's old seal. You see, there is only my name and the date outside the envelope, though no one could possibly read anything through that glass if they tried." She broke the seal and opened out the enclosed document, looking wistfully at me as she did so. "To think of you—the baby that I remember

in your red shoes and sash—coming to help me with this weary weight of money! A quarter of a million. An awful charge for one poor old body. And one not brought up to the position either: your father will have told you that?"

"He once said something ——" I hesitated.

"Told you I was Sir Josiah's cook most likely," she said, smoothing out the sheets of paper with a composed smile. "Well, I wasn't. I was his kitchen-maid." She stopped, enjoying my look of surprise, then nodded at the alderman over the chimney-piece. "Yes, there he is, a knight and alderman of the City of London. I must tell you how it came about, as your father hasn't done so. You're sure you'll not take a glass of wine first?"

I declined again and yet again before she began her story, settling her cap ribbons and stroking the cat into a contented purr.

"Yes, I was kitchen-maid at Sir Josiah Postlethwaite's fine establishment in Bloomsbury Square. There were three other servants, and nice times they had of it. All the house to themselves from breakfast time till Sir Josiah returned about six o'clock from the City. Once or twice a week there might be company at dinner, and very grand dinners those were. All the rest of the week nothing particular to do, or if there was I had to do it. I never set eyes on my master till one day about twelve o'clock he came home unexpectedly and rang the library bell. The butler was out on some errand of his own, the housemaid getting a new dress tried on, so I had to answer it. I found him in this very chair, with his overcoat still on and his hat in his hand, just as he had dropped down in it. 'I'm not very well,' he said. 'Can you get me something hot—soup or something, and a glass of wine?' What a temper cook flew into! *She* wasn't going to serve meals all day long for anybody. I got it at last, but the butler had the wine-cellar and sideboard keys in his pocket. However, Sir Josiah could touch nothing after all. 'What's your name—you are a new comer, are you not?' he asked. 'Bessy Alison? And you come from Workington?' and he looked quite pleased. The butler came in just then, so I went back to the kitchen. Presently down came my gentleman looking very white and flustered. 'I'm going,' he says. 'Me and master have had a difference.' Then he and the others had a long talk together in the pantry. 'Bessy, master says you're to go for Dr. Shaw —No. 15—just across the square.' I thought he might have told me sooner, but I ran at once. I was kept some time, and when I got back I found the house open, but not a creature downstairs, only all their boxes fastened up and labelled in the scullery. Master and I were left alone in the house, and he was sickening for fever, so the doctor said.

"Nurses weren't to be had then as they are now; and, besides, Sir Josiah wouldn't let anyone near him but me. So a woman was got to do the rough work, and I nursed him day and night till he got

better. As soon as he was well, he asked me to marry him. He wasn't the sort of sweetheart I'd fancied to have—poor little old gentleman—but I'd saved his life, and couldn't bear the thoughts of deserting him now, so I said 'Yes,' and never repented it. He was a good husband to me while he lived, and, when he died, left me every penny he possessed, just to do as I chose with."

"It's a great responsibility," I said, inwardly wondering how soon we might set to business.

She shook her head solemnly. "It's not the mere giving away of the money; it's the seeing that it does no mischief that troubles me. You see I've no kin of my own to whom I might rightfully leave it all, nor are there any alive of Josiah's. Then I thought of his first wife, poor soul, a born lady, who helped him and loved him while he was young and poor, and died just as the good times were coming. I've tried to find Mrs. Postlethwaite's people out, and do what I can for them. And there's charities enough to swallow the whole amount, but your father made me promise to take nothing on trust, but to find out for myself how they would be likely to spend it if I gave it them; and that has been a long job, and a heart-breaking one. I'm nearly settled now, but there are still changes to be made."

She turned over the leaves of the will, making comments on each bequest, while I made a few ineffective notes, and strove to possess my soul in patience. I was rewarded. She ended by producing a most business-like little list of the additions she desired. They were few and trifling till we came to the last, over which she paused and hesitated.

"Colonel the Reverend Vandenhoff St. George, £50,000."

I opened my eyes, as well I might.

"Did you never hear of him? I thought everyone must know the great work he's doing in the West End. The converted dragoon the paper here calls him. He has his Tuesday and Friday meetings here, too. An afternoon tea for ladies on Tuesdays, and a smoking concert for gentlemen on Fridays. He's a grand speaker. You must come and hear him. I want to give him a chapel of his own, as the clergy won't have him in the church. Now, when will you come and meet him?"

I was prepared with an evasion, but just then the door opened, and a fur-clad young lady entered briskly, carrying a violin-case. She stopped when she saw me, and, with a pretty gesture of apology, withdrew.

"You can come in, Letty. We've done all our business. How did the rehearsal go off? You're just in time to show Mr. Austen the azaleas before lunch. You'll not mind being left to Letty for half an hour, Mr. Philip? There are some things I think I can do better myself than anyone else, and a vol-au-vent is one of them."

I made another effort to escape—a feeble one this time—and, having collected my papers, found myself following "Letty" or

"Miss Dorrian," as I discovered her name to be, through the hall into the large conservatory with its banks of bloom—the dear old lady's one extravagance, as I was informed. "She'll spend her money right royally for other people's good—or their pleasure—that's the best good to some of us, you know," laughed the girl. Two little maids, in big aprons and mob caps, looked up from scrubbing the encaustic tiles as we passed.

"Look at them—miserable little lodging-house slaveys when she discovered them. She'll teach and train them into perfect little servants—she has the gift—and then, when she might begin to get some comfort out of them, send them off into good places and begin all over again with a series of fresh incapables. The house is full of them—and of us."

"Who are 'us'?" I enquired, as we made our way from the azaleas into the palm house.

"Odds and ends, waifs and strays of girls wanting holidays or music lessons, or pretty frocks, or anything we can't get and she can give us. She's a saint upon earth," Miss Dorrian went on with enthusiasm it was pretty to see. "A comical, cozy, comfortable saint, helping the needy, never sparing herself, wise and kind and unselfish. Why shouldn't a saint wear satin gowns and smart caps?"

I was unable to raise an objection, so we wandered on from the palms into the orchid house and so back again, by which time I had mentally voted skating very poor fun, and Hendon the last place I wished to see that afternoon.

Just as we gained the entrance to the hall, Miss Dorrian stopped suddenly. A loud imperative knock and ring resounded through the house. Then a loud imperative voice enquired for Lady Postlethwaite, and someone passed in with a heavy martial tread.

"That man again!" she whispered with a black frown. "Do you know him? That converted Colonel?"

"Salvation Army rank, I suppose?"

"Nothing so respectable. Her Majesty dispensed with his services for some very good reasons that his friends don't care to enquire into. He says he has a mission to the upper classes. I don't know what he does in the West End, but here all the little suburban gentilities run after him to revel in the society of the aristocratic fellow-converts he introduces them to. Lord Levant relates his turf experiences with penitence and abasement, and Lady Mildred Bagley holds forth about the dark days when she was a worldling and a society beauty."

"I know them both, professionally. Not in connection with anything approaching a religious service by any means, unless it's the collection." We had gained the drawing-room door, and Miss Dorrian nodded, laughed and left me to enter by myself.

The reverend Colonel stood with his big feet firmly planted on the white rug before the fire. A tall, broad-shouldered fellow, floridly

good looking, and with a loud aggressive manner. Lady Postlethwaite in a fresh and smarter cap sat in a low chair beneath him looking up admiringly. She introduced me in a pleased little flutter, wheron he drew himself up smartly like a sentry on duty.

"Friend or enemy? Give the countersign."

This startling reception was, I imagined, a bit of special affectation, so I made a point of being quite unimpressed, returned the stare of his black eyes with a bland smile and replied: "As I don't happen to know which side you are on, suppose you consider me a neutral."

"Which side I am on?"—he began, but I refrain from a full report of the discourse which followed. If he was in earnest it was in the worst of taste; if not, simply blasphemous.

"I shall enlist you yet. You are a recruit after my own heart," he concluded, slapping me on the shoulder as we went in to luncheon. He gave us a long grace, much edifying my dear old hostess, and then proceeded to rejoice her heart by a thorough and frank enjoyment of the good things before him. He complimented her on the dishes, ordered up varieties of wine, sent the little maids in waiting flying hither and thither, addressing them as "Mary, my dear," and made sundry gallant speeches to Miss Dorrian, for which I could have cheerfully seen him choked on the spot.

He was an amusing dog withal; even I was compelled to admit. He had a jovial and rollicking way of relating his adventures and they were strange and amusing ones; and he put in his dash of piety artistically so as not to spoil a good story, and to pass one or two which otherwise might have been considered rather risky.

Lady Postlethwaite opened her eyes and clasped her hands at his narrations of peril by land and sea; or smiled and purred delightedly over his minute accounts of the sayings and doings of the Royal personages with whom he had been privileged to associate. Afterwards he sat down to the piano and sang us a rattling hilarious hymn or two, with an irresistible chorus, followed by some plaintive North Country ditties that made Lady Postlethwaite wipe her eyes and rub her glasses. I don't wonder at the success of the smoking concerts. His voice, with training, might have been a fortune to him. I left him in the possession of the field.

I found my father too ill to attend to my report. There seemed no chance of his being able to attend to business for many a day to come. So as soon as the codicil was prepared it fell to my share to pay Lady Postlethwaite a second visit. She received me as kindly as before, but seemed absent and disturbed. "I should like to see your good father. How soon will he be back?" she asked, as she searched for a piece of red ribbon to enclose the will and codicil.

"He'll not stop a day longer at Carlsbad than he can help, you may be sure. I'll send him to you at once."

I saw how her hands shook as she tied up the envelope. She stopped once and seemed about to speak to me; but checked herself and dis-

missed the little maid who had witnessed the codicil, with instructions to bring in "The old Madeira. Mr. Austen's wine."

I lighted a taper and she produced Sir Josiah's ponderous gold chain and seals.

"Colonel St. George" was announced, and the chain and seal fell clashing to the floor. The Colonel saluted me with his customary boisterous geniality, and withdrew with a newspaper to the window while we finished our business. I was glad to get away from him and, in dread of an invitation to dinner, accepted a glass of the old Madeira and bade a hasty farewell. The wine had a curious effect upon me I fancied. After leaving the house I lingered about, reluctant to go, haunted by the aggravating idea that I had left some commission unfulfilled, or forgotten some important part of my errand. I felt for the key. I had that safe enough, and I knew I had locked the door securely. I must hurry home if I wanted to see my father, so hailing the first cab I jumped in, throwing my overcoat on the front seat. We had reached the end of the road before I glanced at it and there, lying beside it, was Lady Postlethwaite's will. There is no mistake about it. How had it come there? Had we locked up the wrong paper? I stopped the driver, and as I did so the paper slipped from my hand. I searched, and so did he, but in vain. The window had been shut; it could not have fallen out. Had I been dreaming? I felt ashamed of the idea but how else could I account for this. "That old Madeira," I mentally decided. "My unlucky governor! If he goes there often I don't wonder he has to finish at Carlsbad."

I saw him off and spent the rest of the evening with an old college friend who had come up to town about marriage settlements. He had a great deal to tell me about his lady love and I sat smoking, tranquilly listening to his raptures and thinking—who knows why—about Letty Dorrian.

I was awakened early next morning by Harris, my father's man, who stood by my bed-side with a face of concern. "Very sorry to have to rouse you, sir; but a most urgent message has come—Lady Postlethwaite, sir—would you kindly bring that key at once!"

I sprang up. "Hot water directly, Harris, and send for a cab. How did the message come?" Harris's blank look stopped me. "What time did Lady Postlethwaite send?"

"Lady Postlethwaite, sir! I never mentioned her ladyship. I was saying that cook says the boiler pipes is froze up she thinks, and she wants to know what she is to do about your bath and the kitchen fire? Sorry to disturb you, sir."

I laughed it off to Harris, but I felt annoyed, and the annoyance lasted all that day and far into the night. I dreamed of that sealed packet till morning. Now I was opening the envelope and discover ing the contents to be a monster poster of one of Colonel St. George's afternoon teas; or I was hunting frantically for that key through piles

and piles of old rusty bunches which Letty, her eyes full of tears, threw down before me; or I was reading the will and turning the pages over in vain search of the last sheet, while the Colonel laid his heavy hand on my shoulder and sang his jovial chorus in my ear. Always the two together, and always connected by some notion of foul play and derision. I awoke fagged and unrefreshed and seriously concerned about my state of health. I had no time to attend to it just then, however, and by midday had almost forgotten my troubles. My friend asked me to dinner to meet another old schoolfellow, a young doctor named Mellor. We looked in at a theatre after dinner, and they both walked home with me.

We had a good deal to talk over about old times, and lingered sauntering up and down one side of our sober, old-fashioned square, almost deathlike in its stillness after the noisy Strand. At last I ran up our steps and rang the bell, then suddenly turned chill and faint, catching hold of Mellor's arm. "What's that?"

"This?" said Mellor, surprised, stooping and picking up a white long-folded paper that lay at my feet. "Something of yours. I didn't see you drop it, though."

I held out a shaking hand. *This* could be no delusion. I touched, I held, I saw—distinctly as ever I did—Lady Postlethwaite's will.

I turned it over. I saw in the bright moonlight the red ribbon fastened with the great red seal. I read the two gothic letters "J. P.," and saw the endorsement in the precise old hand: "Elizabeth Postlethwaite, 16th February, 1888."

I knew Mellor was wondering at me as I stood gazing stupidly. Then came the clatter of a boy's feet on the pavement and a youth cantered up gaily. "Beg pardon, sir. Have you seen a parcel? Yes, sir; that's it. Thought I must have dropped it here. Left a note in your box from Johnson and Palliser just now."

The front door opened, letting out a blaze of gas, in which I saw in my hand a commonplace parcel fastened with an ordinary twist of string, with no resemblance to the will but in size. I gave it up in such confusion that Mellor looked oddly at me.

"Aren't you well, Austen?"

"I don't know. Come in. I want to consult you."

He looked serious over my story, asked a string of questions, and ended by pronouncing it a case of hallucination, brought on by debility and over-work. Could I not take a holiday at once?

I demurred. Next thing to impossible in my father's absence.

"Then I'll write you a prescription for a composing draught. Let me know how you feel after a night of unbroken sleep."

He did so. I had a night of sweet, dreamless sleep, and felt so well next morning that I wrote in the joy of my heart to say so.

I was interrupted by my clerk before I had finished the first few lines. When I read them over they ran as follows:—

"DEAR LADY POSTLETHWAITE,—I will be with you without fail early to-morrow, as you desire."

I threw the pen down in a sort of panic. My mind was going; I felt convinced of it. I sent for Mellor, who looked graver than before.

"You must have further advice. I may have overdone that sleeping draught, and it is taking its revenge. I can't be sure. Here is the address of a first-rate man—a specialist. Go and talk to him." I promised I would.

The great man ordered me away without loss of time. He also gave me another variety of sleeping-stuff. I took it with the most singular result. It seemed to deprive me at once of all volition, while leaving my senses us acute as ever.

Harris bade me "Good-night," and left me, believing me to be sound asleep; but though I had been unable to reply to him by a word or the lifting of an eyelid, I could hear every movement he made, and follow the sounds by which I knew the house was being closed for the night.

I lay so for more than an hour, and then in the same strange, mesmerised condition I got up and dressed, let myself quietly out, and, I hardly know how, found myself on my way to Lincoln's Inn. I had the keys of the office with me, though I had no recollection of bringing them, and let myself in. I next remember opening the tin box with Sir J. Postlethwaite's name still outside, and searching amongst the papers there. I found, as I knew I should, a duplicate copy which my father had had made of the will, but not of the codicil. I brought it away, and also the sealed envelope containing the book-case key. I left all safe, made my way home, and sank into a long, dreamless, refreshing sleep, that lasted till Harris woke me.

The copy of the will lay on my dressing table and the key beside it. I sat and looked at them in a sort of panic. Then a sudden determination seized me. I would go at once to Lady Posthethwaite and see if, once brought into contact with the realities, my visions might not of themselves depart. There was no harm trying. I made a rapid despatch of the day's business and drove down—late as it was—to the Deodaras.

The little maid-servant had disappeared, and a hulking man in a smart livery opened the door. He stared at me, for all reply to my enquiry. I repeated it—"Is Lady Postlethwaite at home?"

"*Lady Postlethwaite St. George* is *not* at home," was the astounding answer I received.

I stood in surprised consternation. The door was closing in my face, when a young lady, who was crossing the hall, turned and looked at me, and with a glad cry ran forward and caught me by the hand. It was Miss Dorrian.

She drew me in without another word, past the staring servant, into the room where we had first met

"She was afraid you were not coming. Did you never get a letter from her?"

"Never. But what does this mean? Lady Postlethwaite St. George? Has she married that man?"

Letty clasped her hands and looked piteously in my face.

"Oh, is it not miserable? What can have possessed her? Did you know or guess anything of it when you were here?"

"Nothing. How should I?"

"She may have been married to him even then. We don't know when or where it took place. She must have been infatuated, poor dear, and then ashamed of it. I know she kept the secret as long as he would let her, but he got impatient and wanted to come here as master. I think people were getting a little tired of his preaching, and it was not paying so well. He has given it up, that is one good thing."

"Are you staying here?"

"In *his* house? No indeed! I left the very day I heard it. I took advantage of his being away to-night to come and see her. She was so overcome I hardly knew how to leave her. I will tell her you are here."

She hurried away and I waited, looking around me. The house had suffered visible change and deterioration. The room smelt of tobacco, empty soda-water bottles littered the sideboard, a crumpled sporting paper was stuffed into the cushion of the dear old lady's chair, and a card of racing engagements was stuck in poor Sir Josiah's frame, which, like everything else, was thick with dust.

Letty reappeared directly. "You are to come to her at once, and you are to bring the will with you if you have the key."

I took out the key with a curious feeling that I had done it all before, and knew exactly what would happen next. I could see the packet through the narrow slit of glass, but the lock refused to turn at first. I withdrew the key, and found a tiny morsel of wax clogging the wards. Then I tried again, this time with success. The packet was just as I had seen it when Lady Postlethwaite and I left it there.

Lady Postlethwaite was in her bed-room cowering over the fire, wrapped in a big dressing-gown in which she looked grievously small and shrunken. Her face was drawn and aged, and tears came into her eyes as she held out a shaky hand to me. She held me tight as if feeling some comfort in the clasp of my fingers.

"I wish it were your good father that had come, Mr. Philip. He'd maybe have had more pity for me than you young folks. I've been a foolish old woman and a very unhappy one."

"We needn't talk about it, need we? Can't I do something to help you?"

"Yes, you can. I was just wearying to see you. I've been thinking that though I've ruined all that's left me of my own life, I

must make sure that others don't suffer for my madness. I want to go over that will again, Mr. Philip. It'll stand good, you know. Poor Josiah took care of that."

I gave it to her and she turned it over and over, examining it keenly. Then she opened it.

"Lord save us!" she cried. "Look here!" The contents lay in her lap. So many blank sheets of foolscap, nothing else.

"She looked from them to us once or twice. Then she sat bolt upright, her eyes began to shine and the trembling of her hands ceased. My desk, Letty, quick." She folded the sheets together and slowly and consideringly wrote a few lines on the outer one. "Now, Mr. Philip, can you and Letty make that envelope look as if it had never been opened?"

We managed to do so by the aid of a fresh ribbon and by carefully spreading the wax of the new seal over the place where the old one had been broken open.

"Now Mr. Philip, I shall want you at once to draw me a fresh will exactly like the old one. How soon can you do it?"

"I have a duplicate here now, Lady Postlethwaite. You have only to sign it. But the codicil, what about that? And Colonel St. George—you must consider him."

"I have considered him. He will find a remembrance there," she nodded towards the sealed packet. "As much as I dare do for him now."

We were interrupted by the announcement of the doctor's arrival. I was glad, for I fancied I saw signs of feverish exhaustion in the poor old woman. I was glad, too, to hear the name of a man high in his profession. I knew it well by reputation.

Letty and I withdrew to the cheerless dining-room, where I replaced the packet in the bookcase, and then stood beside her over the fireless, ashy grate, talking sorrowfully of the gentle, useful life so woefully cut short.

"Do you think her very ill?" she asked.

"I am afraid so. Can you guess what ails her?"

"I think her heart is broken!" Letty said with a sob. "He didn't ill-use her, as you mean by ill-usage, but she loved him and believed in him—and now she knows him as he is.—Oh, it's cruel, cruel!"

We were again summoned to Lady Postlethwaite. Letty trembled so as we approached the door that I caught her hand half-unconsciously to reassure her, and it was on our joined hands that the old lady's sharp eyes glanced as we entered. She cast a rapid, interrogating look on my face. I felt Letty start and the little fingers thrill warm to their tips. I deliberately stooped and raised them to my lips, while Lady Postlethwaite's face lighted up with amusement, comprehension and satisfaction all in a flash.

The doctor standing near her had lost the by-play.

"I'm telling Dr. Vincent what I'm after, and he's not objecting. Stay where you are, doctor. Now, Mr. Philip, read that will over again."

One bequest—that to "my dear friend, Letitia Dorrian" had been left blank. I asked what sum I was to fill in.

"Fifty thousand pounds," she said firmly. Letty gave a cry and I hesitated.

"It won't be all for herself," she went on. "I can trust her. Letty, you know my wishes and all I should have liked to do if I had lived a free woman. You'll make good all I leave undone, eh, dear? And may be, Mr. Philip here may give you his help if you ask him." And the ghost of a kindly twinkle shone in her eyes.

The will was duly signed, the doctor and his coachman acting as witnesses. She gave it to me. "Keep this and tell no one. Let the other be opened first. Now I should like you to have this; it will never be used again. Take it with my love, and good-bye." She placed Sir Josiah's massive chain and seal in my hands; then drew me down and softly kissed my forehead. I never saw her again.

My father was terribly concerned to receive the invitation to the funeral of his good old friend directly on his return. We both went, curious to see how events would turn out. It was an imposing affair. The arrangements were of the costliest description. Colonel St. George Postlethwaite, in the profoundest of mourning, was, of course, the centre of interest, a spectacle of heart-broken bereavement. Invitations had been sent far and wide. Old City friends of Sir Josiah's, governors of charitable institutions, the local clergy, every creature who could be assumed to have the slightest claim to such an attention. Lord Levant and a train of aristocratic converts rallied round their evangelist. There were others, uninvited guests, who thronged the cemetery, no one knew who or how many, grieving sorely for their kind, lost friend; and I fancied I could distinguish a scattering of the poor dead Mrs. Postlethwaite's kin, an anxious-faced struggling set, to whom the withdrawal of their earthly providence made the future a very black look-out indeed.

The Colonel was liberal in his invitations to the sumptuous luncheon which followed, at which he presided with subdued geniality. He had resumed his piety for the occasion, and his conversation was most edifying.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, when the servants had withdrawn: "I am a plain soldier, and only accustomed to plain speaking. You all want to know, of course, how my dear wife has disposed of the property of which, in her lifetime, she was so faithful a steward." (I omit irrelevancies, however improving.) "So do I. She kept her own affairs in her hands to the last, and I wasn't the man to prevent her doing so. Whatever she did, she did of her own free will, uninfluenced by me. And I will say here, that up to the hour of her

death, she was as clear-headed, right-minded a woman of business as anyone could find. Is it not so, Dr. Vincent."

The doctor gave an emphatic assent.

"You must ask these gentlemen," indicating my father and me, "about her investments, and about her testamentary dispositions, if there are any, but I tell you, gentlemen, that I do not expect to find any. She was not a woman to trust by halves, and she knew her worldly wealth in my hands would be blessed, etc. etc."

"Hear, hear!" from Lord Levant.

A thrill of consternation seemed to run round the room after this plain declaration. The charity officials looked blankly into one another's faces, and the hungry-eyed relatives glared on us with wolfish eyes, as my father took the key from me.

"Let's look here first, if you please. If there is a will, we shall find it here." He drew forth the packet, and handed it to the Colonel, who, with an incredulous shake of the head, opened it. The sight of his wife's hand-writing inside made him pause and look wildly around. "This is private—not a will, you see. It's nothing, nothing." He dropped into his chair, while the blank sheets of foolscap strewed the floor at his feet, keeping his hand clutched tightly over his wife's last message. His face took a ghastly hue. He drew the nearest decanter to him, and poured out a glassful.

It was clear my time had come. I gave the circumstances as briefly I could, referred to Colonel St. George's own testimony as to his wife's state, and produced the veritable last will of Lady Postlethwaite.

The hungry-eyed relatives grew serene and placid as the reading went on, the charity officials shook hands with one another, and my father "Blessed his soul" copiously when it ended.

They all came crowding round me to examine it and question me as to the details, and in the confusion Colonel St. George Postlethwaite disappeared from our sight for ever. So did Lady Postlethwaite's dressing-case and a large sum of ready money which was known to be in the house.

Colonel St. George is sorely missed by a large circle of believing followers and I hear still more so by a larger circle of unsatisfied creditors.

"And to think that if the scoundrel had only left that will alone he would have succeeded to the whole. The poor old lady would never have known that her subsequent marriage invalidated it. A quarter of a million lost for the want of a little ordinary legal knowledge. Bless my soul!" says my father.

GOOD ADVICE.

Be watchful guardian of those eyes of yours,
Those lights that lead the hearts of men your way;
Nor use them like the marsh-light that allures
All passers-by, and lures them all astray.
Indeed, 'twere better if on me alone,
The light of those enchanting lamps were thrown.

For pity's sake laugh seldom, and be slow
To smile that sudden smile that thrills one through;
For when you smile those four sweet dimples show,
And no one knows the mischief dimples do.
Or, if you must smile, smile on me: I fear
No danger from your daintiest dimples, dear.

Speak little. There is something in your voice
That seems to send the English language mad;
And when you say "Be sad!" men hear "Rejoice!"
And when you say "Despair!" they hear "Be glad!"
I know your harshest word must music be
To any man in Europe except me.

And never let a hand that holds a rose
Droop near to lips of man as this to mine;
It is the breath of roses, I suppose,
That stirs the blood of most of us, like wine.
And most men would have kissed your hand to-day
Before you snatched it and its rose away!

And if your hand is threatened with a kiss,
Don't frown and blush and smile, if you are wise;
For if you do, a hand will come—like this—
And turn your face round to your lover's eyes.
And then—and then—for anything I know,
It's possible that he may kiss you—so!

E. Nesbit.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

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THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RESTITUTION.

TIME had gone on; weeks and weeks; though there is not much to tell of their passing. Things generally remained pretty much as they had been. The Levels were abroad again. Mrs. Brightman on the whole was better, but had occasional relapses; Annabel spent most of her time at Hastings; and Tom Heriot had not yet been captured.

Tom was now at an obscure fishing village on the coast of Scotland, passing himself off as a fisherman, owning a small boat and pretending to catch fish. This did not appease our anxiety, which was almost as great as ever; still, it was something to have him away from London. Out of Great Britain he refused to go.

Does the reader remember George Coney's bag of money, that had so strangely disappeared the night of Mr. Brightman's death? From that hour to this nothing had been seen or heard of it: but the time for it was now at hand. And what I am about to relate may appear a very common-place ending to a mystery—though, indeed, it cannot be said yet that it was the ending. In my capacity of story-teller I could have invented a hundred romantic incidents, and worked them, and the reader, up to a high point of interest; but I can only record the incident as it happened, and its termination was very matter-of-fact.

I sat one evening in the front room: a sitting-room now—and I think this has been said before—smoking my after-dinner cigar. The window was open to the summer air, which all day long had been intensely hot. A letter received in the morning from Gloucestershire from Mr. Coney, to which his son had scrawled a postscript: "Has that bag turned up yet?" set me thinking of the loss, and from that I fell to thinking of the other loss of the Clavering will, which had

followed close upon it. Edmund Clavering, by the way, had been with me that day to impart a bit of news: he was going to be married; to a charming girl, too; and we were discussing the settlements. My Lady Clavering, he said, was figuring at Baden-Baden, and report ran that she was about to espouse a French Count with a fierce moustache.

Presently I took up the *Times*, not opened before that day, and was deep in a police case, which had convulsed the court in Marlborough Street with laughter, and was convulsing me, when a vehicle dashed down Essex Street. It was the van of the Parcels Delivery Company.

"Mr. Strange live here?" was the question I heard, from the man who had descended from the seat beside the driver, when Watts went out.

"All right," said Watts.

"Here's a parcel for him. Nothing to pay."

The driver coquetted with his horse, then turned sharp round, and —overturned the van. It was not the first accident of a similar nature, or the last, by many, that I have seen in that particular spot. How it is I don't know, but drivers, especially cabmen, have an unconquerable propensity for pulling their horses round in a dangerously short fashion at the bottom of Essex Street, and sometimes the result is that they come to grief. I threw down my newspaper and leaned out at the window, watching the fun. The street was covered with parcels, and the driver and his friend were throwing off their consternation in choice language. One hamper could not be picked up: it had contained wine, loosely packed, and the broken bottles were lying in a red pool. Where the mob collected from that speedily arrived to assist was a marvel. The van at length took its departure up the street, considerably shorn of the triumph with which it had dashed down.

This had taken up a considerable space of time, and it was growing too dark to resume my newspaper. Turning from the window, I proceeded to examine the parcel which Watts had brought up on its arrival and placed on the table. It was about a foot square, wrapped in brown paper, sealed and tied with string; and, in what Tony Lumpkin would have called a confounded cramped, up-and-down hand, where you could not tell an izzard from an R, was directed "C. Strange, Esquire."

I took out my penknife, cut the string, and removed the paper; and there was disclosed a pasteboard box with green edges, which was also sealed. I opened it, and from a mass of soft paper, put in to steady its contents, took out a small canvas bag, tied round with tape, and containing thirty golden sovereigns!

From the very depth of my conviction, I believed it to be the bag we had lost. It was the bag; for, on turning it round, there were Mr. Coney's initials, S. C., neatly marked with blue cotton, as they

had been on the one left by George. It was one of their sample barley bags. I wondered if they were the same sovereigns. Where had it been? Who had taken it? And who had returned it?

I rang the bell, and then called to Watts, who was coming up to answer it, to bring Leah also. It was my duty to tell them, especially Leah, of the money's restitution, as they had been inmates of the house when it was lost.

Watts only stared and ejaculated; but Leah, with some colour, for once, in her pale cheeks, clasped her hands. "Oh, sir, I'm thankful you have found it again!" she exclaimed. "I'm heartily thankful!"

"So am I, Leah," I said. "Though the mystery attending the transaction is as great as ever; indeed, more so."

It certainly was. They went down again, and I sat musing over the problem. But nothing could I make out of it. One moment I argued that the individual taking it (whoever it might be) must have had temporary need of money, and, the difficulty over, had now restored the money. The next, I wondered whether anyone could have taken the bag inadvertently, and had now discovered it. I locked the bag safely up, wrote a letter to George Coney, and then went out to confide the news to Arthur Lake.

Taking the short cuts and passages that lead from Essex Street to the Temple, as I generally did when bound for Lake's chambers, I was passing onwards, when I found myself called to—or I thought so. Standing still in the shade, leaning against the railings of the Temple gardens, was a slight man of middle height: and he seemed to say "Charley."

Glancing in doubt, half stopping as I did so, yet thinking I must have been mistaken, I was passing on, when the voice came again.

"Charley!"

I stopped then. And I declare that in the revulsion it brought me you might have knocked me down with a feather; for it was Tom Heriot.

"I was almost sure it was you, Charles," he said in a low voice, "but not quite sure."

I had not often had such a scare as this. My heart, with pain and dismay, beat as if it meant to burst its bonds.

"Can it possibly be *you?*" I cried. "What brings you here? Why have you come again?"

"Reached London this morning. Came here when dusk set in, thinking I might have the luck to see you or Lake, Charley."

"But why have you left Scotland? You were safer there."

"Don't know that I was. And I had grown tired to death of it."

"It will end in death, or something like it, if you persist in staying here."

Tom laughed his gay, ringing laugh. I looked round to see that no one was about, or within hearing.

"What a croaker you are, old Charley! I'm sure you ought to kill the fatted calf, to celebrate my return from banishment."

"But, Tom, you *know* how dangerous it is and must be for you to be here in London."

"And it was becoming dangerous up there," he quickly rejoined. "Since the summer season set in, those blessed tourists are abroad again, with their staves and knapsacks. No place is safe from them, and the smaller and obscurer it is, the more they are sure to find it. The other day I was in my boat in my fishing toggery, as usual, when a fellow comes up, addresses me as 'My good man,' and plunges into queries touching the sea and the fishing-trade. Now who do you think that was, Charles?"

"I can't say."

"It was James Lawless, Q.C. The leader who prosecuted at my trial."

"Good heavens!"

"I unfastened the boat, keeping my back to him and my face down, and shot off like a whirlwind, calling out that I was behind time, and must put out. I took good care, Charles, not to get back before the stars were bright in the night sky."

"Did he recognise you?"

"No—no. For certain, no. But he would have done so had I stayed to talk. And it is not always that I could escape as I did then. You must see that."

I saw it all too plainly.

"So I thought it best to make myself scarce, Charles, and leave the tourists' haunts. I sold my boat; no difficulty in that; though, of course, the two men who bought it shaved me; and came over to London as fast as a third-class train would bring me. Dare not put my nose into a first-class carriage, lest I should drop upon some one of my old chums."

"Of all places, Tom, you should not have chosen London."

"Will you tell me, old fellow, what other place I could have pitched upon?"

And I could not tell.

"Go where I will," he continued, "it seems that the Philistines are likely to find me out."

We were pacing about now, side by side, keeping in the shade as much as possible, and speaking under our breath.

"You will have to leave the country, Tom; you must do it. And go somewhere over the seas."

"To Van Diemen's Land, perhaps," suggested Tom.

"Now be quiet. The subject is too serious for jesting. I should think — perhaps — America. But I must have time to consider. Where do you mean to stay at present? Where are you going to-night?"

"I've been dodging about all day, not showing up much; but

I'm going now to where I lodged last, down Blackfriars way. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember: it is not so long ago."

"It is as safe as any other quarter, for aught I can tell. Anyway, I don't know of another."

"Are you well, Tom?" I asked. He was looking thin, and seemed to have a nasty cough upon him.

"I caught cold some time ago and it hangs about me," he replied. "Oh, I shall be all right now I'm here," he added carelessly.

"You ought to take a good jorum of something hot when you get to bed to-night ——"

Tom laughed. "I *am* likely to get anything of that sort in any lodging I stand a chance of to-night. Well done, Charley! I haven't old Leah to coddle me."

And somehow the mocking words made me realise the discomforts and deprivations of Tom Heriot's present life. How would it fall end?

We parted with a hand-shake: he stealing off on his way to his lodging, I going thoughtfully on mine. It was a calm summer evening, clear and lovely, the stars twinkling in the sky, but all its peace had gone out for me.

It was impossible to foresee what the ending would or could be. At any moment Tom might be recognised and captured, so long as he inhabited London; and it might be difficult to induce him to leave it. Still more difficult to cause him to depart altogether for other lands and climes.

Not long before, I had consulted with Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar as to the possibility of obtaining a pardon for Tom. That he had not been guilty was indisputable, though the law had deemed him so. But the Sergeant had given me no encouragement that any such movement would be successful. The very fact, as he pointed out, of Tom Heriot's having escaped clandestinely would tell against him. What, I said then, if Tom gave himself up? He smiled, and told me I had better not ask his opinion upon the practical points of the case.

So the old trouble was back again in full force, and I knew not how to cope with it.

The summer sun, glowing with light and heat, lay full upon Hastings and St. Leonards. The broad expanse of sea sparkled beneath it; the houses that looked on the water were burning and blistering in the fierce rays. Miss Brightman, seated at her drawing-room window, knitting in hand, observed that it was one of the most dazzling days she remembered.

The remark was made to me and to Annabel. We sat at the table together, looking over a book of costly engravings that Miss Brightman had recently bought. "I shall leave it with you, Charles," she said,

"when I go away; you will take care of it. And if it were not that you are tied to London, and it would be too far for you to go up and down daily, I would leave you my house also—that you might live in it, and take care of that during my absence."

Mrs. Brightman had come to her senses. Very much, I confess, to my astonishment, much also I think to Annabel's, she had put aside her prejudices and consented to our marriage. The difficulty of where her daughter was to be during Miss Brightman's sojourn in Madeira, had in a degree paved the way for it. Annabel would of course have returned to her mother; she begged hard to be allowed to do so: she believed it her duty to be with her. But Miss Brightman would not hear of it, and, had she yielded, I should have interposed my veto in Mr. Brightman's name. In Hatch's words, strong in sense but weak in grammar, "their home wasn't no home for Miss Annabel."

Mrs. Brightman could only be conscious of this. During her sojourn at Brighton and for some little time after her return home, she had been very much better; had fought resolutely with the insidious foe, and conquered. But alas! she fell away again. Now she was almost as bad as ever; tolerably sober by day, very much the opposite by night.

Miss Brightman, dating forward, seeing, as she feared, only shoals and pitfalls, and most anxious for Annabel, had journeyed up to Clapham to her sister-in-law, and stayed there with her a couple of days. What passed between them even Hatch never knew; but she did know that her mistress was brought to a penitent and subdued frame of mind, and that she promised Lucy Brightman, with many tears, to *strive* to overcome her fatal habit for the good God's sake. And it was during this visit that she withdrew her opposition to the marriage; when Miss Brightman returned home she carried the consent with her.

And my present visit to Hastings was to discuss time and place, and other matters; more particularly the question of where our home was to be. A large London house we were not yet rich enough to set up, and I would not take Annabel to an inferior one; but I had seen a charming little cottage at Richmond that might suit us—if she liked the locality.

Closing the book of engravings, I turned to Miss Brightman, and entered upon the subject. Suddenly her attention wavered. It seemed to be attracted by something in the road.

"Why, bless my heart, *it is!*" she cried in astonishment. "If ever I saw Hatch in my life, that is Hatch—coming up the street! Annabel, child, give me the glasses."

The glasses were on the table, and I handed them to her. Annabel flew to the window and grew white. She was never free from fears of what might happen in her mother's house. Hatch it was, and apparently in haste.

"What can be the matter?" she gasped. "Oh, Aunt Lucy!"

"Hatch is nodding heartily, as if not much were wrong," remarked Miss Brightman, who was watching her through the glasses. "Hatch is peculiar in manner, as you are aware, Mr. Charles, but she means no disrespect with it."

I smiled. I knew Hatch quite as well as Miss Brightman knew her.

"Now what brings you to Hastings?" she exclaimed, rising from her chair, when Hatch was shown in.

"My missis brought me, ma'am," returned Hatch with composure. "Miss Annabel, you be looking frighted, but there's nothing wrong. Yesterday morning, all in a flurry like, your mamma took it into her head to come down here, and we drove down with ——"

"*Drove* down?"

"Yes, ma'am, with four posters to the carriage. My missis can't abear the rail; she says folks stare at her: and here we be at the Queen's Hotel, she, and me, and Perry."

"Would you like to take a chair, Hatch?" said Miss Brightman.

"My legs is used to standing, ma'am," replied Hatch with a nod of thanks, "and I've not much time to linger. It was late last night when we got here. This morning, up gets my missis and downstairs she comes to her breakfast in her sitting-room, and me with her to wait upon her, for sometimes her hands is shaky and she prefers me to Perry or anybody else ——"

"How has your mistress been lately?" interposed Miss Brightman.

"Better, ma'am. Not always quite the thing, though a deal better on the whole. But I must get on about this morning," added Hatch impressively. "'Waiter,' says my missis when the man brings up the coffee. 'Mum?' says he. 'I am subject to spadical attacks in the chest,' says she, 'and should like to have some brandy in my room: they take me sometimes in the middle of the night. Put a bottle into it, the very best French, and a corkscrew. Or you may as well put two bottles,' she goes on, 'I may be here some time.' 'It shall be done, mum,' says he. I was as vexed as I could be to hear it," broke off Hatch, "but what could I do? I couldn't contradict my missis and tell the man that no brandy must be put in her room, or else she'd drink it. Well, ma'am, I goes down presently to my own breakfast with Perry, and while we sat at it a chambermaid comes through the room: 'I've put two bottles of brandy in the lady's bedroom, as was ordered,' says she. With that Perry looks at me all in a fluster—he have no more wits to turn things off than a born idiot. 'Very well,' says I to her, eating at my egg as if I thought nothing, 'I hopes my missis won't have no call to use 'em, but she's took awful bad in the chest sometimes, and it's as well for us to be ready.' 'I'm sure I pities her,' says the girl, 'for there ain't nothing worse than spasms. I has 'em myself occasional ——'"

When once Hatch was in the full flow of a narrative, there was no getting in a word edgeways, and Miss Brightman had to repeat her question twice: "Does Perry know the nature of the illness that affects Mrs. Brightman?"

"Why, in course he does, ma'am," was Hatch's rejoinder. "He couldn't be off guessing it for himself, and the rest I told him. Why, ma'am, without his helping, we could never keep it dark from the servants at home. It was better to make a confidant of Perry, that I might have his aid in screening the trouble, than to let it get round to everybody. He's as safe and sure as I be, and when it all first came out to him he cried over it, to think of what his poor master must have suffered in mind before death took him. Well, ma'am, I made haste over my breakfast, and I went upstairs, and there was the bottles and the corkscrew, so I whips 'em off the table and puts them out of sight. Mrs. Brightman comes up presently and looks about and goes down again. Three separate times she comes up, and the third time she gives the bell a whirl, and in runs the chambermaid, who was only outside. 'I gave orders this morning,' says my lady, 'to have some brandy placed in the room.' 'Oh, I have got the brandy,' says I, before the girl could speak; 'I put it in the little cupboard here, ma'am.' So away goes the girl, looking from the corners of her eyes at me, as if suspicious I meant to crib it for my own use: and my mistress began: 'Draw one of them corks, Hatch.' 'No, ma'am,' says I, 'not yet; please don't.' 'Draw 'em both,' says missis—for there are times," added Hatch, "when a trifle puts her out so much that it's hazardous to cross her. I drew the cork of one, and missis just pointed with her finger to the tumbler on the wash-hand-stand, and I brought it forward and the decanter of water. 'Now you may go,' says she; so I took up the corkscrew. 'I told you to leave that,' says she, in her temper, and I had to come away without it, and the minute I was gone she turned the key upon me. Miss Annabel, I see the words are grieving of you, but they are the truth, and I can but tell them."

"Is she there now—locked in?" asked Miss Brightman.

"She's there now," returned Hatch, with solemn enunciation, to make up for her failings in grammar, which was never anywhere in times of excitement; "she is locked in with them two bottles and the corkscrew, and she'll just drink herself mad—and what's to be done? I goes at once to Perry and tells him. 'Let's get in through the winder,' says Perry—which his brains is only fit for a gander, as I've said many a time. 'You stop outside her door to listen again. Downright harm,' says I, 'that's what you'll do; and I'll go for Miss Brightman.' And here I'm come, ma'am, running all the way."

"What can I do?" wailed Miss Brightman.

"Ma'am," answered Hatch, "I think that if you'll go back with me, and knock at her room door, and call out that you be come to pay her a visit, she'd undo it. She's more afeared of you than of anybody

living. She can't have done herself much harm yet, and you might coax her out for a walk or a drive, and then bring her in to dinner here—anything to get her away from them two dangerous bottles. If I be making too free, ma'am, you'll be good enough to excuse me—it is for the family's sake. At home I can manage her pretty well, but to have a scene at the hotel would make it public."

"What is to be the ending?" I exclaimed involuntarily as Miss Brightman went in haste for her bonnet.

"Why the ending must be— just what it will be," observed Hatch philosophically. "But, Mr. Charles, I don't despair of her yet. Begging your pardon, Miss Annabel, you'd better not come. Your mamma won't undo her door if she thinks there's many round it."

Annabel stood at the window as they departed, her face turned from me, her eyes blinded with tears. I drew her away, though I hardly knew how to soothe her. It was a heavy grief to bear.

"My days are passed in dread of what tidings may be on the way to me," she began, after a little time given to gathering composure. "I ought to be nearer my mother, Charles; I tell Aunt Lucy so almost every day. She might be ill and dead before I could get to her, up in London."

"And you will be nearer to her shortly, Annabel. My dear, where shall our home be? I was thinking of Richmond——"

"No, no," she interrupted, in sufficient haste to show me she had thoughts of her own.

"Annabel! It shall not be *there:* at your mother's. Anywhere else."

"It is somewhere else that I want to be."

"Then you shall. Where?"

She lifted her face like a pleading child's, and spoke in a whisper. "Charles, let me come to you in Essex Street."

"*Essex Street!*" I echoed in surprise. "My dear Annabel, I will certainly not bring you to Essex Street and its inconveniences. I cannot do great things for you yet, but I can do better than that."

"They would not be inconveniences to me. I would turn them into pleasures. We would take another servant to help Watts and Leah; or two if necessary. You would not find me the least encumbrance; I would never be in the way of your professional rooms. And in the evening when you had finished for the day we would dine, and go down to mamma's for an hour, and then back again. Charles, it would be a happy home: let me come to it."

But I shook my head. I did not see how it could be arranged; and said so.

"No, because at present the idea is new to you," returned Annabel. "*Think it over*, Charles. Promise me that you will do so."

"Yes, my dear; I can at least promise you that."

There was less trouble with Mrs. Brightman that day than had been anticipated. She opened her door at once to her sister-in-law,

who brought her back to the Terrace. Hatch had been wise. In the afternoon we all went for a drive in a fly, and returned to dinner. And the following day Mrs. Brightman with her servants departed for London in her travelling carriage, no scandal whatever having been caused at the Queen's Hotel. I went up by train early in the morning.

It is surprising how much thinking upon a problem simplifies it. I began to see by degrees that Annabel's coming to Essex Street could be easily managed; nay, that it would be for the best. Miss Brightman strongly advocated it. At present a large portion of my income had to be paid over to Mrs. Brightman in accordance with her husband's will, so that I could not do as I would, and must study economy. Annabel would be rich in time; for Mrs. Brightman's large income, vested at present in trustees, must eventually descend to Annabel; but that time was not yet. And who knew what expenses Tom Heriot might bring upon me?

Changes had to be made in the house. I determined to confine the business rooms to the ground floor; making Miss Methold's parlour, which had not been much used since her death, my own private consulting room. The front-room on the first floor would be our drawing-room, the one behind it the dining-room.

Leah was in an ecstasy when she heard the news. The workmen were coming in to paint and paper, and then I told her.

"Of course, Mr. Charles, it—is ——"

"Is what, Leah?"

"Miss Annabel."

"It should be no one else, Leah. We shall want another servant or two, but you can still be major-domo."

"If my poor master had only lived to see it!" she uttered, with enthusiasm. "How happy he would have been! how proud to have her here! Well, well, what turns things take!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONFESSION.

October came in; and we were married early in the month, the wedding taking place from Mrs. Brightman's residence, as was of course only right and proper. It was so very quiet a wedding that there is not the least necessity for describing it—and how can a young man be expected to give the particulars of his own? Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar was present; Lord and Lady Level, now staying in London, drove down for it; and Captain Chantry gave his niece away. For Mrs. Brightman had chosen to request him to accept her invitation to do so, and to be accompanied by his wife, Lady Grace. Miss Brightman was also present, having travelled up from Hastings the day before. Three or four days later on, she would sail for Madeira.

I could not spare more than a fortnight from work, leaving Lennard as my locum tenens. Annabel would have been glad to spare less, for she was haunted by visions of what might happen to her mother. Though there was no especial cause for anxiety in that quarter just now, she could never feel at ease. And on my part I was more anxious than ever about Tom Heriot, for more reasons than one.

The fortnight came to an end, all too soon: and late on the Saturday evening we reached home. Watts threw open the door, and there stood Leah in a silk gown. The drawing-room, gayer than it used to be, was bright with a fire and preparations for tea.

"How home-like it looks!" exclaimed Annabel. "Charles," she whispered, turning to me with her earnest eyes, as she had been wont to do when a child: "I will not make the least noise when you have clients with you. You shall not know I am in the house: I will take care not to drop even a reel of cotton on the carpet. I do thank you for letting me come to Essex Street: I should not have seemed so completely your wife had you taken me to any but your old home."

The floors above were also in order, their chambers refurnished. Leah went up to them with her new mistress, and I went down to the clerks' office, telling Annabel I should not be there five minutes. One of the clerks, Allen, had waited; but I had expected Lennard.

"Is Mr. Lennard not here?" I asked. "Did he not wait? I wrote to him to do so."

"Mr. Lennard has not been here all day, sir," was Allen's reply. "A messenger came from him this morning, to say he was ill."

We were deep in letters and other matters, I and Allen, when the front door opened next the office door, and there stood Arthur Lake, laughing, a light coat on his arm.

"Fancy! I've been down the river for a blow," cried he. "Just landed at the pier here. Seeing lights in your windows, I thought you must have got back, Charley."

We shook hands, and he stayed a minute, talking. Then, wishing good-night to Allen, he backed out of the room, making an almost imperceptible movement to me with his head. I followed him out, shutting the office door behind me. Lake touched my arm and drew me outside.

"I suppose you've not heard from Tom Heriot since you were away," breathed Lake, in cautious tones, as we stood together on the outer step.

"No; I did not expect to hear. Why?"

"I saw him three days ago," whispered Lake. "I got a queer-looking letter on Wednesday morning from one Mr. Dominic Turk, asking me to call at a certain place in Southwark. Of course I guessed it was Tom, and that he had moved his lodgings again; and I found I was right."

"Dominic Turk!" I repeated. "Does he call himself *that?*"

Lake laughed. "He is passing now for a retired schoolmaster. Says he's sure nobody can doubt he is one as long as he sticks to that name."

"How is he? Has any fresh trouble turned up? I'm sure you've something bad to tell me."

"Well, Charley, honestly speaking, it is a bad look-out, in more ways than one," he answered. "He is very ill, to begin with; also has an idea that a certain policeman named Wren has picked up an inkling of his return, and is trying to unearth him. But," added Lake, "we can't very well talk in this place. I've more to say——"

"Come upstairs, and take tea with me and Annabel," I interrupted.

"Can't," said he; "my dinner's waiting. I'm back two hours later than I expected to be; it has been frizzling, I expect, all the time. Besides, old fellow, I'd rather you and I were alone. There's fearful peril looming ahead, unless I'm mistaken. Can you come round to my chambers to-morrow afternoon?"

"No: we are going to Mrs. Brightman's after morning service."

"It must be left until Monday, then; but I don't think there's much time to be lost. Good-night."

Lake hastened up the street, and I returned to Allen and the letters.

With this interruption and with all I found to do, the five minutes' absence I had promised my wife lengthened into twenty. At last the office was closed for the night, Allen left, and I ran upstairs, expecting to have kept Annabel waiting tea. She was not in the drawing-room, the tea was not made, and I went up higher and found her sobbing in the bedroom. It sent me into a cold chill.

"My love, what is this? Are you disappointed? Are you not happy?"

"Oh, Charles," she sobbed, clinging to me, "you *know* I am happy. It is not that. But I could not help thinking of my father. Leah got talking about him; and I remembered once his sitting in that very chair, holding me on his knee. I must have been about seven years old. Miss Methold was ill——"

At that moment there came a knock and a ring at the front door. Not a common knock and ring, but sharp, loud and prolonged, resounding through the house as from some impatient messenger of evil. It startled us both. Annabel's fears flew to her mother; mine to a different quarter, for Lake's communication was troubling and tormenting me.

"Charles! if——"

"Hush, dear. Listen."

As we stood outside on the landing, her heart beating against my encircling hand, and our senses strained to listen, we heard Watts open the front door.

"Has Mr. Strange come home?" cried a voice hurriedly—that of a woman.

"Yes," said Watts.

"Can I speak to him? It is on a matter of life and death."

"Where do you come from?" asked Watts, with habitual caution.

"I come from Mr. Lennard. Oh, pray do not waste time!"

"All right, my darling; it is not from your mother," I whispered to Annabel, as I ran down.

A young woman stood at the foot of the stairs; I was at a loss to guess her condition in life. She had the face and manner of a lady, but her dress was poor and shabby.

"I have come from my father, sir—Mr. Lennard," she said in a low tone, blushing very much. "He is dangerously ill: we fear he is dying, and so does he. He bade me say that he must see you, or he cannot die in peace. Will you please be at the trouble of coming?"

One hasty word despatched to my wife, and I went out with Miss Lennard, hailing a cab, which had just set down its freight some doors higher up. "What is the matter with your father?" I questioned, as we whirled along towards Blackfriars Bridge, in accordance with her directions.

"It is an attack of inward inflammation," she replied. "He was taken ill suddenly last night after he got home from the office, and he has been in great agony all day. This evening he grew better; the pain almost subsided; but the doctor said that might not prove a favourable symptom. My father asked for the truth—whether he was dying, and the answer was that he might be. Then my father grew terribly uneasy in mind, and said he must see you if possible before he died—and sent me to ascertain, sir, whether you had returned home."

The cab drew up at a house in a side street, a little beyond Blackfriars Bridge. We entered, and Miss Lennard left me in the front sitting-room. The remnants of faded gentility were strangely mixed with bareness and poverty. Poor Lennard was a gentleman born and bred, but had been reduced by untoward misfortune. Trifling ornaments stood about; "anti-macassars" were thrown over the shabby chairs. Miss Lennard had gone upstairs, but came down quickly.

"It is the door on the left, sir, on the second landing," said she, putting a candle in my hand. "My father is anxiously expecting you, but says I am not to go up."

It was a small landing, nothing in front of me but a bare white-washed wall, and *two* doors to the left. I blundered into the wrong one. A night-cap border turned on the bed, and a girlish face looked up from under it.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Pardon me. I am in search of Mr. Lennard."

"Oh, it is the next room. But—sir! wait a moment. Oh, wait, wait!"

I turned to her in surprise, and she put up two thin white hands

in an imploring attitude. "Is it anything bad? Have you come to take him?"

"To take him! What do you mean?"

"You are not a sheriff's officer?"

I smiled at her troubled countenance. "I am Mr. Strange—come to see how he is."

Down fell her hands peacefully. "Sir, I beg your pardon: thank you for telling me. I know papa has sometimes been in apprehension, and I lie here and fear things till I am stupid. A strange step on the stairs, or a strange knock at the door, sets me shaking."

The next room was the right one, and Lennard was lying in it on a low bed; his face looked ghastly, his eyes wildly anxious.

"Lennard," I said, "I am sorry to hear of your illness. What's the matter?"

"Sit down, Mr. Strange; sit down," he added, pointing to a chair, which I drew near. "It is an attack of inflammation: the pain has ceased now, but the doctor says it is an uncertain symptom: it may be for better, or it may be for worse. If the latter, I have not many hours to live."

"What brought it on?"

"I don't know: unless it was that I drank a draught of cold water when I was hot. I have not been very strong for some time, and a little thing sends me into a violent heat. I had a long walk, four miles, and I made nearly a run of it half the way, being pressed for time. When I got in, I asked Leah for some water, and drank two glasses of it, one after the other. It seemed to strike a chill to me at the time."

"It was at the office, then. Four miles! why did you not ride?"

"It was not your business I was out on, sir; it was my own. But whether that was the cause or not, the illness came on, and it cannot be remedied now. If I am to die, I must die; God is over all: but I cannot go without making a confession to you. How the fear of death's approach alters a man's views and feelings!" he went on, in a different tone. "Yesterday, had I been told I must make this confession to you, I should have said, Let me die, rather; but it appears to me now to be an imperative duty, and one I must nerve myself to perform."

Lennard lay on his pillow, and looked fixedly at me, and I, not less fixedly, at him. What, in the shape of a "confession," could he have to make to me? He had been managing clerk in Mr. Brightman's office long before I was in it, a man of severe integrity, and respected by all.

"The night Mr. Brightman died," he began under his panting breath, "the bag of gold was missing—George Coney's. You remember it."

"Well?"

"I took it."

Was Lennard's mind wandering? He was no more likely to take gold than I was. I sat still, gazing at him.

"Yes, it was I who took it, sir. Will you hear the tale?"

A deep breath, and the drawing of my chair closer to his bedside, was my only answer.

"You are a young man, Mr. Strange. I have taken an interest in you since you first came, a lad, into the office, and were under my authority—Charles, do this; Charles, do the other. Not that I have shown any especial interest, for outwardly I am cold and undemonstrative; but I saw what you were and liked you in my heart. You are a young man yet, I say; but, liking you, hoping for your welfare, I pray Heaven that it may never be your fate, in after life, to be trammelled with misfortunes as I have been. For me they seem to have had no end, and the worst of them in later years has been that brought upon me by an undutiful and spendthrift son."

In a moment there flashed into my mind *my* later trouble in Tom Heriot: I seemed to be comparing the one with the other. "Have you been trammelled with an undutiful son?" I said aloud.

"I have been, and am," replied Lennard. "It has been my later cross. The first was that of losing my property and position in life, for, as you know, Mr. Strange, I was born and reared a gentleman. The last cross has been Leonard—that is his name, Leonard Lennard—and it has been worse than the first, for it has kept us *down* and in a perpetual ferment for years. It has kept us poor amongst the poor: my salary, as you know, is a handsome one, but it has chiefly to be wasted upon him."

"What age is he?"

"Six-and-twenty yesterday."

"Then you are not forced to supply his extravagance, to find money for his faults and follies. You are not obliged to let him keep you down."

"By law, no," sighed poor Lennard. "But these ill-doing sons sometimes entwine themselves around your very heartstrings; far rather would you suffer and suffer than not ward off the ill from them. He has tried his hand at many occupations, but remains at none; the result is always trouble: and yet his education and intellect, his good looks and perfect, pleasant manners would fit him for almost any responsible position in life. But he is reckless. Get into what scrape he would, whether of debt, or worse, here he was sure of a refuge and a welcome: I received him, his mother and sisters loved him. One of them is bed-ridden," he added in an altered tone.

"I went first by mistake into the next room. I probably saw her."

"Yes, that's Maria. It is a weakness that has settled in her legs; some chronic affection, I suppose; and there she has lain for ten months. With medical attendance and sea air, she might be restored, they tell me, but I can provide neither. Leonard's claims have been too heavy."

"But should you waste means on him that ought to be applied to her necessities?" I involuntarily interrupted.

He half raised himself on his elbow, and the effort proved how weak he was, and his eyes and his voice betrayed a strange earnestness. "When a son, whom you love better than life itself, has to be saved from the consequences of his follies, from prison, from worse disgrace even than that, other interests are forgotten, let them be what they may. Silent, patient needs give way to obtrusive wants that stare you in the face, and that may bear fear and danger in their train. Mr. Strange, you can imagine this."

"I do. It must ever be so."

"The pecuniary wants of a young man, such as my son is, are as the cry of the horse-leech. Give! give! Leonard mixes sometimes with distant relatives, young fellows of fashion, who are moving in a sphere far above our present position, although I constantly warn him not to do it. One of these wants, imperative, and to be provided for in some way or other, occurred the beginning of February in this year. How I managed to pay it I can hardly tell, but it stripped me of all the money I could raise, and left me with some urgent debts upon me. The rent was owing, twelve months the previous December, and some of the tradespeople were becoming clamorous. The landlord, discerning the state of affairs, put in a distress, terrifying poor Maria, whose illness had then not very long set in, almost to death. That I had not the means to pay the man out you may judge, when I tell you that we had not the means to buy a joint of meat or a loaf of bread."

Lennard paused to wipe the dew from his brow.

"Maria was in bed, wanting comforts; Charlotte was worn out with apprehension; Leonard was away again, and we had nothing. Of my wife I will not speak: of delicate frame and delicately reared, the long-continued troubles have reduced her to a sort of dumb apathy. No credit anywhere, and a distress in for rent! In sheer despair, I resolved to disclose part of my difficulty to Mr. Brightman, and ask him to advance me a portion of my next quarter's salary. I hated to do it. A reduced gentleman is, perhaps, over-fastidious. I know I have been so, and my pride rose against it. In health, I could not have spoken to you, Mr. Charles, as I am now doing. I went on, shilly-shallying for a few days. On the Saturday morning Charlotte came to me with a whisper: 'That man in the house says if the rent is not paid to-night, the things will be taken out and sold on Monday: it is the very last day they'll give.' I went to the office, my mind made up at length, and thinking what I should say to Mr. Brightman: should I tell him part of the truth, or should I urge some plea, foreign to it. It was an unusually busy day: I daresay you remember it, Mr. Charles, for it was that of Mr. Brightman's sudden death. Client after client called, and no opportunity offered for my speaking to him in private. I waited for him

to come down, on his way out in the evening, thinking I would speak to him then. He did not come, and when the clients left, and I went upstairs, I found he was stopping in town to see Sir Edmund Clavering. I should have spoken to him then, but you were present. He told me to look in again in the course of the evening, and I hoped I might find him alone then. You recollect the subsequent events of the night, sir?"

"I shall never forget them."

"When I came in, as he directed me, between seven and eight o'clock, there occurred that flurry with Leah—the cause of which I never knew. She said Mr. Brightman was alone, and I went up. He was lying in your room, Mr. Charles; had fallen close to his own desk, the deep drawer of which stood open. I tried to raise him; I sprinkled water on his face, but I saw that he was dead. On the desk lay a small canvas bag. I took it up and shook it. Why, I do not know, for I declare that no wrong thought had then come into my mind. He appeared to have momentarily put it out of the drawer, probably in search of something, for his private cheque-book and the key of the iron safe, that I knew were always kept in the drawer, lay near it. I shook the bag, and its contents sounded like gold. I opened it, and counted thirty sovereigns. Mr. Brightman was dead. I could not apply to him; and yet money I must have. The temptation upon me was strong, and I took it. Don't turn away from me, sir. There are some temptations too strong to be resisted by man in his necessities."

"Indeed, I am not turning from you. The temptation was overwhelmingly great."

"Indeed," continued the sick man, "the devil was near me then. I put the key and the cheque-book inside, and I locked the drawer, and placed the keys in Mr. Brightman's pocket, where he kept them, and I leaped down the stairs with the bag in my hand. It was all done in a minute or two of time, though it seems long in relating it. Where should I put the bag, now I had it? Upon my person? No: it might be missed directly, and inquired for. I was all in a tumult: scarcely sane, I believe, and I dashed into the clerks' office, and, taking off the lid of the coal-box, put it there. Then I tore off for a surgeon. You know the rest. When I returned with him you were there; and the next visitor, while we were standing round Mr. Brightman, was George Coney, after his bag of money. I never shall forget the feeling when you motioned me to take Mr. Brightman's keys from his pocket to get the bag out of the drawer. Or when—after it was missed—you took me with you to search for it, in the very office where it was, and I moved the coal-box under the desk. Had you only happened to lift the lid, sir!"

"Ah!"

"When the search was over, and I went home, I had put the bag in my breast-pocket. The gold saved me from immediate trouble, but ——"

"You have sent it back to me, you know; the bag and the thirty pounds."

"Yes, I sent it back—tardily. I *could* not do it earlier, though the crime coloured my days with remorse, and I never knew a happy moment until it was restored. But Leonard had been back again, and restoration was not easy."

Miss Lennard opened the door at this juncture. "Papa, the doctor is here. Can he come up? He says he ought to see you."

"Oh, certainly, he must come up," I interposed.

"Yes, yes, Charlotte," said Lennard.

The doctor came in, and stood looking at his patient, after putting a few questions. "Well," said he, "you are better; you will get over it."

"Do you really think so?" I asked joyfully.

"Decidedly I do, now. It has been a sharp twinge, but the danger's over. You see, when pain suddenly ceases, mortification sometimes sets in, and I could not be sure. But you will do this time, Mr. Lennard."

Lennard had little more to say; and, soon after the doctor left, I prepared to follow him.

"There's a trifle of salary due to me, Mr. Strange," he whispered; "that which has been going on since Quarter Day. I suppose you will not keep it from me?"

"Keep it from you! No. Why should I? Do you want it at once? You can have it if you do."

Lennard looked up wistfully. "You do not think of taking me back again? You will not do that?"

"Yes I will. You and I shall understand each other better than ever now."

The tears welled up to his eyes. He laid his other hand—I had taken one—across his face. I bent over him with a whisper.

"What has passed to-night need never be recurred to between us: and I shall never speak of it to another. We all have our trials and troubles, Lennard. A very weighty one is lying now upon me, though it is not absolutely my own—*brought* upon me, you see, as yours was. And it is worse than yours."

"Worse!" he exclaimed, looking at me.

"More dangerous in its possible consequences. Now mind," I broke off, shaking him by the hand; "you are not to attempt to come to Essex Street until you are quite strong enough for it. But I shall see you here again on Monday, for I have two or three questions to ask you as to some of the matters that have transpired during my absence. Good-night, Lennard, keep up a good heart; you will outlive your trials yet."

And when I left him he was fairly sobbing.

CHAPTER XXX.

DANGER.

Mrs. Brightman was certainly improving. When I reached her house with Annabel on the following day, Sunday, between one and two o'clock, she was bright and cheerful, and came towards the entrance-gates to meet us. She, moreover, displayed interest in all we told her of our honeymoon in the Isle of Wight and of the places we had visited. Besides that, I noticed that she took water with her dinner.

"If she'll only keep to it," said Hatch, joining me in her unceremonious fashion as I strolled in the garden later, smoking a cigar. "Yes, Mr. Charles, she's trying hard to put bad habits away from her, and I hope she'll be able to do it."

"I hope and trust she will!"

"Miss Brightman went back to Hastings the day after the wedding-day," continued Hatch; "but before she started she had a long interview with my mistress, they two shut up in missis's bedroom alone. For pretty nigh all the rest of the day, my missis was in tears, and she have not touched nothing strong since."

"Nothing at all!" I cried in surprise, for it seemed too good to be true. "Why, that's a fortnight ago! More than a fortnight."

"Well, it is so, Mr. Charles. Not but that missis has tried as long and as hard before now—and failed again."

It was Monday evening before I could find time to go round to Lake's—and he did not come to me. He was at home; poring over some difficult law case by lamp-light.

"Been in court all day, Charley," he cried. "Have not had a minute to spare for you."

"About Tom?" I said, as I sat down. "You seem to say that you had more unpleasantness to tell me."

"Aye, about Tom," he replied, turning his chair to face me, and propping his right elbow upon his table. "Well, I fear Tom is in a bad way."

"In health, you mean?"

"I do. His cough is frightful, and he is more like a skeleton than a living being. I should say the illness has laid hold of his lungs."

"Has he had a doctor?"

"No. Asks how he is to have one. Says a doctor might (they were his own words) smell a rat. Doctors are not called in to the class of people lodging in that house unless they are dying: and it would soon be seen by any educated man that Tom is not of *their* kind. My opinion is, that a doctor could not do him much good now," added Lake.

He looked at me as he spoke; to see, I suppose, whether I took in his full meaning. I did—unhappily.

"And what do you think he is talking of now, Charles?" returned Lake. "Of giving himself up."

"Giving himself up! What, to justice?"

Lake nodded. "You know what Tom Heriot is—not much like other people."

"But why should he think of *that?* It would end everything."

"I was on the point of asking him why," said Lake. "Whether I should have had a satisfactory answer, I cannot say; I should think he could not give one; but we were interrupted. Miss Betsy Lee came in."

"Who? What?" I cried, starting from my chair.

"The young lady you told me of who lives in Lambeth—Miss Betsy Lee. Sit down, Charley. She came over to bring him a pot of jelly."

"Then he has let those people know where he is, Lake! Is he mad?"

"Mad as to carelessness," assented Lake. "I tell you Tom Heriot's not like other people."

"He will leave himself no chance."

"She seems to be a nice, modest little woman," said Lake, "and I'll go bail her visit was quite honest and proper. She had made this jelly, she told Tom, and she and her father hoped it would serve to strengthen him, and her father sent his respects and hopes to hear that Captain Strange was feeling better."

"Well, Lake, the matter will get beyond me," I said in despair. "Only a word dropped, innocently, by these people in some dangerous quarter, and where will Tom be?"

"That's just it," said Lake. "Policeman Wren is acquainted with them."

"Did you leave the girl there?"

"No. Some rough man came into the room smoking, and sat down, evidently with the intention of making an evening of it; he lives in the same house and has made acquaintance with Tom, or Tom with him. So I said good-night, and the girl did the same, and we went down together. 'Don't you think Captain Strange looks very ill, sir?' said she as we got into the street. 'I'm afraid he does,' I answered. 'I'm sure he does, sir,' she said. 'It's a woful pity that somebody should be coming upon him for a big back debt just now, obliging him to keep quiet in a low quarter!' So that is what Tom has told his Lambeth friends," concluded Lake.

Lake gave me the address in Southwark, and I determined to see Tom the next evening. In that, however, I was disappointed. One of our oldest clients, passing through London from the country on his way to Pau, summoned me to him on the Tuesday evening.

But I went on Wednesday. The stars were shining overhead as I traversed the silent street, making out Tom's lodgings. He

had only an attic bedroom, I found, and I went up to it. He was partly lying across the bed when I entered.

I almost thought even then that I saw death written in his face. White, wan, shadowy it looked; much changed, much worn from what it was three weeks before. But it lighted up all over with a smile, as he got up to greet me.

"Halloa, Charley!" cried he. "Best congratulations! Made yourself into a respectable man. All good luck to yourself and madam. I'm thinking of coming to Essex Street to pay the wedding visit."

"Thank you," said I, "but do be serious. My coming here is a hazard, as you know, Tom; don't let us waste in nonsense the few minutes I may stay."

"Nonsense!" cried Tom. "Why, do you think I should be afraid to venture to Essex Street?—what nonsense is there in that? Look here, Charley!"

From some box in a dark corner of the room he got out an old big blue cloak lined with red, and swung it on. The collar, made of some black curly wool, stood up above his ears. He walked about the small room, exhibiting himself.

"Would the sharpest officer in Scotland Yard take me for anyone but old Major Carlen?" laughed he. "I'm sure I look like his double in this elegant cloak. It was his, once."

"His! What, Major Carlen's?"

"Just so. He made me a present of it."

"You have seen him, then!"

"I sent for him," answered Tom, putting off the old cloak and coughing painfully after his recent exertion. "I thought I should like to see the old fellow; I was not afraid he'd betray me; Carlen would not do that; and I dropped a quiet note to his club, taking the chance of his being in town."

"Taking the chance! Suppose he had not been in town, Tom, and the note had fallen into wrong hands—some inquisitive waiter, let us say, who chose to open it?"

"Well—what then? A waiter would only turn up his nose at Mr. Dominic Turk, the retired schoolmaster, and close up the note again for the Major."

"And what would Major Carlen make of Mr. Dominic Turk?"

"Major Carlen would know my handwriting, Charley."

"And he came in answer to it?"

"He came: and blew me up in a loud and awful fashion; seemed to be trying to blow the ceiling off. First, he threatened to go out and bring in the police; next, he vowed he would go straight to Blanche and tell her all. Finally, he calmed down and promised to send me one of his cast-off cloaks to disguise me, in case I had to go into the streets. Isn't it a beauty?"

"Well, now, Tom, if you can be serious for once, what is going to become of you, and what is to be done? I've come to know."

"Wish I could tell you; don't know myself," said he lightly.

"What was it you said to Lake about giving yourself up?"

"Upon my word of honour, Charley, I sometimes feel inclined to do it. I couldn't be much worse off in prison than I am here. Sick and sad, lad, needing comforts that can't be had in such a place as this; no one to see after me, no one to attend to me. Anyway, it would end the suspense."

I sat turning things about in my mind. It all seemed so full of hazard. That he must be got away from his present quarters was certain. I told him so.

"But you are so recklessly imprudent, you see, Tom," I observed, "and it increases the risk. You have had Miss Betsy Lee here."

Tom flung himself back with a laugh. "She has been here twice, the good little soul. The old man came once."

"Don't you think you might as well take up your standing to-morrow on the top of the monument, and proclaim yourself to the public at large? You try me greatly, Tom."

"Try you because I see the Lees! Come, Charley, that's good. They are as safe as you are."

"In intention, perhaps. How came you to let them know you were to be found here?"

"How came I?" he carelessly rejoined. "Let's see. Oh, I remember. One evening when I was hipped, fit to die of it all and of the confinement to this wretched room, I strolled out. My feet took me to the old ground—Lambeth—and to Lee's. He chanced to see me and invited me in. Over some whisky-and-water I opened out my woes to them; not of course the truth, but as near as might be. Told them of a creditor of past days that I feared was coming down upon me, so that I had to be in hiding for a bit."

"But you need not have told them where."

"Oh, they'll be cautious. Miss Betsy was so much struck with my cough and my looks that she said she should make some jelly for me, of the kind she used to make for her mother before she died; and the good little girl has brought me some over here twice in a jar. They are all right, Charley."

It was of no use contending with him. After sitting a little time longer, I promised that he should shortly see me again or hear from me, and took my departure. Full of doubt and trouble, I wanted to be alone, to decide, if possible, what was to be done.

What to do about Tom I knew not. That he required nursing and nourishment, and that he ought to be moved where he could have it, was indisputable. But—the risk!

Three parts of the night I lay awake, thinking of different plans. None seemed feasible. In the morning I was hardly fit for my day's work, and set to it with unsteady nerves and a worried brain. If I had only someone to consult with, some capable man who would help me! I did think of Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar; but I knew he would

not like it, would probably refuse advice. One who now and again sat in the position of judge, sentencing men himself, would scarcely choose to aid in concealing an escaped convict.

I was upstairs in the dining-room at one o'clock, taking luncheon with Annabel, when the door was thrown back by Watts, and there loomed into the room the old blue cloak with the red lining. For a moment I thought it was the one I had seen the past night in Southwark, and my heart leaped into my mouth. Watts's quiet announcement dispelled the alarm.

"Major Carlen, sir."

The Major unclasped his cloak after shaking hands with us, and flung it across the sofa, just as Tom had flung his on the bed. I pointed to the cold beef and asked if he would take some.

"Don't mind if I do, Charles," said he, drawing a chair to the table: "I'm too much bothered just now to eat as I ought. A pretty kettle-of-fish this is, lad, that you and I have had brought upon us!"

I gave him a warning look, glancing at Annabel. The old fellow understood me—she had not been trusted with the present trouble. That Tom Heriot had effected his escape, Annabel knew, that it was expected he would make his way home, she knew; but that he had long been here, and was now close at hand, I had never told her. Why inflict upon her the suspense I had to endure?

"Rather a chilly day for the time of year," observed the Major, as he coughed down his previous words. "Just a little, Mrs. Strange; underdone, please."

Annabel, who carved at luncheon time, helped him carefully. "And what kettle-of-fish is it that you and Charles are troubled with, Major?" she inquired smiling.

"Ah—aw—don't care to say much about it," answered the Major, more ready at an excuse than I should have deemed him. "Blanche is up to her ears in anger against Level; says she'll get a separation from him, and all that kind of nonsense. Have you heard from your Aunt Lucy yet, Mrs. Strange?"

So the subject was turned off for the time; but down below, in my office, the Major went at it tooth and nail, talking himself into a fever. All the hard names in the Major's vocabulary were hurled at Tom. His original sin was disgraceful enough, never to be condoned, said the Major; but his present imprudent procedure was worse, and desperately wicked.

"Are Blanche and her husband still at variance?" I asked, when he had somewhat cooled down on the other subject.

"They just are; and are likely to remain so," growled the Major. "It's Blanche's fault. Men have ways of their own, and she's a little fool for wishing to interfere with his. Don't let your wife begin that, Charles; it's my best advice to you. You are laughing! Well, perhaps you and Level don't row in quite the same boat; but you can't foresee the shoals you may pitch into. No one can."

We were interrupted by Lennard: who had come back on the previous day; pale, and pulled down by his sharp attack of illness, but the same efficient man of business as ever. A telegram had been delivered, which he could not deal with without me.

"I'll be off, then," said the Major; "I suppose I'm only hindering work. And I wish you well through your difficulties, Charles," he added significantly. Good day, Mr. Lennard."

The Major was ready enough to wish *that*, but he could not suggest any means by which it might be accomplished. "I should send him off to sea in a whaling-boat and keep him there," was all the help he gave.

Lennard stayed beyond time that evening; and was ready in my private room to go over certain business with me that had transpired during my own absence. I could not give the necessary attention to it, try as earnestly as I would: Tom and *his* business kept dancing in my brain to the exclusion of other things. Lennard asked me whether I was ill.

"No," I answered; "at least, not in body." And as I spoke, the thought crossed me to confide the trouble to Lennard. He had seen too much trouble himself not to be safe and cautious, and perhaps he might suggest something.

"Let Captain Heriot come to me," he immediately said. "He could not be safer anywhere. Sometimes we let our drawing-room floor; it is vacant now, and he can have it. My wife and my daughter Charlotte will attend to his comforts and nurse him, if that may be, into health. It is the best thing that can be done with him, Mr. Charles."

I saw that it was, seeming to discern all the advantages of the proposal at a grasp, and accepted it. We consulted as to how best to effect Tom's removal, which Lennard himself undertook. I dropped a hasty note to "Mr. Turk," to prepare him to be in readiness the following evening, and Lennard posted it when he went out. He had no sooner gone, than the door of my private room slowly opened, and, rather to my surprise, Leah appeared.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for presuming to disturb you here," she said; "but I can't rest. There's some great trouble afloat; I've seen it in your looks and ways, sir, ever since Sunday. Is it about Mr. Tom?"

"Well, yes, it is, Leah."

Her face turned white. "He has not got himself taken, surely!"

"No; it's not so bad as that—yet."

"Thank Heaven for it!" she returned. "I knew it was him, and I'm all in a twitter about him from morning till night. I can't sleep or eat for dreading the news that any moment may bring of him. It seems to me, Mr. Charles, that one must needs be for ever in a twitter in this world; before one trouble is mended, another

turns up. No sooner am I a bit relieved about poor Nancy, that unfortunate daughter of mine, than there comes Mr. Tom."

The relief that Leah spoke of was this: Some relatives of Leah's former husband, Nancy's father, had somehow got to hear of Nancy's misfortunes. Instead of turning from her, they had taken her and her cause in hand, and had settled her and her three children in a general shop in Hampshire near to themselves, where she was already beginning to earn enough for a good living. The man who was the cause of all the mischief had emigrated, and meant never to return to Europe.

And Leah had taken my advice in the matter, and disclosed all to Watts. He was not in the least put out by it, as she had feared he would be; only told her she was a simpleton for not having told him before.

(To be continued.)

THE MEADOWS OF LONG AGO.

Oh the sweet wide meadows, the elm-trees tall,
The lilac that grew by the southern wall,
The orchards white, and the gardens neat,
The may, the cowslips, the meadow-sweet,
The pale dog-roses in every hedge,
The narrow path, by the coppice edge,
The path we shall walk by, you and I,
When the white moon rises, by-and-bye—
The path we shall walk by? No, ah no!
It leads through the meadows of long ago.

Our meadows! They've built a chapel there,
And a row of villas, yellow and bare;
And down the path where we used to go,
Stand squalid cottages, all in a row—
And the elms are gone—and our wood's green maze—
Where do the lovers walk now-a-days?
Not through our meadows: the sordid years
Have built upon them—and all our tears
Will never teach the dead grass to grow
On the trampled meadows of long ago!

E. Nesbit.

WILLIAM COWPER.

IN the Parsonage at Great Berkhampstead there was a stir one morning in 1731, but still a stir of no very uncommon kind. The fact that a baby would be added to the parson's household had nothing remarkably interesting about it, for who could have foreseen that this child was to be a great English poet, whose biography would be written, and whose verse would be read in days to come.

There exists no record of special, early precocity of intellect with regard to Cowper's earliest childhood. No doubt he soon began to take little flights into verse; but he was probably too shy and timid a boy to reveal such mysteries as these to those around him. His father was chaplain to George the Second, and this fact may very likely have sometimes brought men fresh from the whirl of London life down to the clergyman's fireside, contact with whom may have sharpened the little lad's wits, and given him new ideas of life. One guardian angel was, we know, ever watching round his childhood, lighting it with her clear eyes, making melody for it with her sweet voice, guiding, soothing, uplifting, sheltering his first nervous shrinkings from the rough touch of the outside world, brightening the all too sensitive future of the embryo poet.

Cowper's love for his mother was, no doubt, as his beautiful lines to her picture sufficiently testify, the first strong, awaking feeling of his life. She probably planted the seeds of all that in after days brought forth any good fruit in his character. Had she lived to complete more fully her work in her son, his life would have had doubtless more healthy sunshine in it, and the mists of morbid sensitiveness would have been almost cleared away. But when he was only a boy his mother was called away from his side, and all the hardest stages of his youth had to be made without her.

Cowper was sent early to school, where the shrinking timidity of his disposition caused him to have no very good time among his companions. This same nervous shyness, which made Cowper's school days no bright period for him, also, no doubt, prevented his shining especially in his schoolwork. He was too proudly sensitive to put himself into competition with other boys, and there was no teacher who understood him well enough to bring him forward. Thus the poet's schooldays passed without his singling himself out in any remarkable manner from the mass of boys of his age and advantages.

Soon after he left Westminster School, his friends selected for him about as uncongenial an employment as they could well have chosen for a youth of his inclinations and character. They articled him to a solicitor. As this attorney lived in London, young Cowper was compelled to reside there also, though his every taste and proclivity

drew him irresistibly towards a country life. His native reserve kept him from forming any very special friends among the many comparative strangers with whom he had intercourse. Therefore so much the more close and intimate became his relations with the family of an uncle who was living at that time in town, and who received him almost as a son.

But though an uncle might stand almost in a father's place, that uncle's daughters might not, perhaps, stand exactly in the light of sisters to a young poet. The uncle, however, forgot this fact, and the cousins were allowed the most familiar, unrestrained intimacy together.

The result was that young Cowper became half engaged to his cousin Theodora; not wholly engaged, because the young lady's father, when he found out how matters stood, put a most uncompromising spoke into the swift-rolling wheel of their young love. He liked his nephew very much as a nephew, but it was quite another thing with the old gentleman when he appeared before him in the character of a would-be son-in-law. His parental fears for Theodora's future were most uncomfortably aroused as he noticed the morbid sensitiveness which daily developed more and more in the young man's nature. This was not the sort of stuff to produce a satisfactory son-in-law of whom a man might be proud. No; Miss Theodora must decidedly not be permitted to bind herself by any fixed promise to such a suitor as this.

The disappointment was no doubt a great one for Cowper. Had Theodora married him, and her bright, healthy influence been brought to bear fully and constantly upon him, it is very likely that the balance of his mind would never have given way, as it afterwards did. As it was, his connection with her only served to produce his first fit of thorough hopeless depression.

Young Cowper's friends, who were always peculiarly anxious and ready to make him happy in their way, without waiting to inquire whether it was his own way as well, now took it into their heads that the best thing they could do for him under present circumstances would be to get him some new employment which would fill up his mind and thrust out of it his unlucky love. They did not pause to ask for what sort of work he was most suited, but they endeavoured to procure him some post which they themselves regarded as honourable and respectable.

After using, for some little time, all the influence they possessed with government, they at length contrived to have him made Commissioner of the Court of Bankruptcy. This office was, however, only worth £60 a-year; so his cousin, Major Cowper, contrived also to obtain for him the post of Clerk of the Journals of the House of Commons.

The announcement of the good news of the honours intended him had, however, a strangely different effect from that they had expected

upon the object of their officious care. Cowper at once shrank from the very thought of undertaking an office which would drag him conspicuously into public life, the very thing of all others which he most hated and shunned. His friends, nevertheless, persisted in wanting to make his fortune for him in spite of himself. He would get over all these ridiculous feelings and fancies, they assured him airily. Cowper's morbidness was not in the least degree relieved by their words. His mind dwelt and dwelt, and worked and worked upon the one subject of the distasteful office into which he was to be pushed. On the eve of the day when he was first to appear in public to commence his new functions, the long irritation of nerves from which he had been suffering caused his brain entirely to give way, and his friends found, to their dismay, that all their efforts for his benefit resulted in a cell in a lunatic asylum.

Repose and medical care after a while restored Cowper's mental balance, and he was able to be released from confinement. The first sane, sound conclusion to which he came on his return to reason was, that he was completely unfitted for the stir and bustle and confusion of London life. Country sights and sounds were his highest earthly joy and refreshment, and amid country sights and sounds the remainder of his life should be spent.

His relations now saw that they had made a terrible mistake with regard to him, and, as they were really very fond of him, they set about repairing the evil they had done him as well as they could. They raised a subscription among themselves for his maintenance, each engaging to pay a certain part. They felt that he would never be able to undertake any work that would bring him in a regular yearly income, so they settled what they gave him upon him for life. Then, in order to save him from all business cares, they put the whole management of his affairs into the hands of his friend, Mr. Hill, the attorney. From this time forward this gentleman became a sort of earthly providence to the poet, keeping all pecuniary matters straight and square for him, and watching over his worldly interests with almost father-like care.

Cowper now left London only to return to it in future for short, passing visits. Theodora's engagement to him had been finally broken off when the symptoms of derangement appeared in his mind, so the single tie was snapped which bound him to the great city. The insanity of Cowper was certainly sufficient reason for Theodora's father to insist on the connection with his daughter being put an end to in a decided and summary manner. As for the young lady herself, though she gave him up at the parental command, and on account of his mental disease, she evidently always retained a strong affection for him, for we find her still his friend in after life.

Cowper now went to reside at Huntingdon, in order to be near a brother who lived at Cambridge. The two towns were not so far apart but that, even in those days of slow travelling, the brothers

could easily go and spend a night or two with each other whenever they pleased. We can fancy that these many little journeys through pure, sweet country air and fair, peaceful country scenes must have given infinite refreshment to Cowper's spirit, and have soothed him with a wondrous power. These excursions were probably often made by Cowper on horseback, the ordinary mode of travelling for single men in those days. We can picture the poet riding along in the green spring, or the golden summer-time, gaining inspiration from each blade, each leaf, each trill of bird or hum of insect round him.

There are less pleasant thoughts than these, however, connected with Cowper's stay at Huntingdon. It was there that the disease, which was always lurking in fearful, shadowy shape in the background of his calm genius, took its most terrible form in an inclination for suicide. He withstood it manfully, however, as he did at two or three other periods of his story, helped by his strong religious faith. There are few instances perhaps on record which show so much what real religion can do for a man as that of Cowper. It is very certain that nothing but his firm religious belief kept him from being either a hopeless maniac or a suicide.

It was at Huntingdon that Cowper made a friendship which was to leave a permanent mark for good upon his life.

One day, on coming out of church, he was struck with the appearance of a middle-aged gentleman and lady and their son. There was something in their faces which had a special attraction for him, and their eyes turned towards him as though they, on their side, took interest in him. This mute intercourse went on for some short time, until at length Cowper and the youngest of the trio slipped into speech and then into close exchange of thought. The young man introduced the poet to his parents, and Cowper soon found that, though he heartily liked the gentlemen, there was a wondrous something in the lady which, in its indescribable sweetness, was like the perfume of spring violets, the melody of distant bells, and which exercised a peculiar spell over him. The connection between him and Mrs. Unwin was begun.

Not long after the friendly intimacy had commenced between Cowper and the Unwins, Mr. Unwin died, and his son soon followed him. This double bereavement naturally had the result of making Mrs. Unwin draw nearer to so true and faithful a friend as Cowper. His sympathy now became a need of her life; while, on the other hand, the tender, womanly care with which she watched over him, at once soothing and strengthening him, filled up the great void left in her heart and her existence. Cowper's was just the sort of sensitive nature to expand in the sunshine of a loving woman's eyes and thrive under the delicate touch of a woman's gentle tact. His affection for Mrs. Unwin grew stronger and stronger, until he made her an offer of marriage.

The two would certainly have been united if it had not been that,

just at this period, Cowper's mind once more showed symptoms of derangement. Hereupon they gave up the project of marriage, but resolved to live on as closest, dearest friends. They went to Olney, in Buckinghamshire, and there they resolved to make their home. This was the most fruitful period of Cowper's genius : his verse flowed out in rich, peaceful streams. The calm, restful influence of Mrs. Unwin over him had probably much to do with this development of his highest powers.

The clergyman of Olney was John Newton, a sincerely religious man, yet one whose religion had always a somewhat gloomy tone. He became intimate with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, and their intercourse together was constant. The effect produced by John Newton on Cowper has been very variously estimated. Some say that he gave him a yet stronger, fuller religious faith, and others that the severity of Newton's views made the poet's mind more morbid and despondent than it was before. Perhaps there is some truth in both these opinions. Newton may have affected Cowper differently at different times, according to the always changeful moods of the poet's quicksilver mind.

And now, at this period, a very bright, interesting scene in Cowper's life rises up before us, and we will pause to take a sketch of it. It is a summer evening. There is a curtain of crimson cloud, bordered with gold, hanging in the west ; there is a little silvery shower of melody falling from the throat of a thrush before he retires for the night ; there is rare incense floating on the breeze, composed of the mixed fragrance of innumerable flowers. From the little town comes ringing a distant peal of children's laughter ; a church clock strikes drowsily hard by.

In a garden four people are sitting, two gentlemen and two ladies. What wondrous depths there are in the eyes of that man, who is leaning against the rose-mantled porch. Is it sadness, is it power, which we read as we gaze into them and strive to decipher their meaning ? And that lady who is sitting near him on the garden bench, with her pale, thoughtful face so tenderly framed by the hair in which there is a net-work of silver threads mingling with the dark braids and by the snowy cap. What a lively interest she rouses in us, though she is neither young nor beautiful. How does her gaze fasten upon the man at her side, as though he were a book, every letter of which has daily some new meaning for her, which she is always longing and yearning to look into !

What a different presence is that of the younger lady, who is reclining with easy, almost lazy grace in the arm-chair she has brought out on to the lawn. What a contrast there is between her fashionable attire of many bright tints, and the quaker-like hue and cut of the other woman's dress. Playful fun seems to be rippling all over her, from the merry twinkle in her eyes down to her little foot, which taps now and then the turf. Her smiles come and go with April

swiftness, the gestures of her small, ringed hands talk nearly as much as her lips. No wonder these two women glance, now and then, at each other with something of suspicion and doubt in their eyes. There is such a contrast between them, and, moreover, they are both so plainly and exclusively occupied with the one thought of observing that man who stands there near the twining roses.

The other gentleman of the group is of a very different stamp from him who absorbs the attention of the ladies. He has placed himself somewhat apart from the rest. His face is rugged and severe, though not without a certain degree of calm dignity; his eyes are chiefly employed with the younger lady, but the gaze is not admiring; there is doubt and distrust in it.

The party have been silent for a few minutes, when the eyes of the lady in the bright, gaily-tinted dress begin to sparkle and dance with mirth, and the sunshine of her smiles to grow more radiant than before. Then she begins to tell a story. Her words are full of animation which thrills through her voice, and the play of her features, and, indeed, her whole person, respond with pantomimic grace to her tale. The thoughtful countenance of the man standing near her first breaks into a passing smile, then all its muscles begin to quiver with suppressed amusement, then he bursts into a peal of ringing laughter. The lady in the grey dress catches the infection, and begins to laugh softly too. That other man, however, leaves the garden with a look of disapproval on his strongly-marked features. His departure is quite unnoticed by the remaining three, they are so wrapped up in the playful magic of the lady's story. Lady Austin is telling Cowper the story of John Gilpin, and Mrs. Unwin cannot but laugh at it, though she and the lively lady are already not the very best of friends. John Newton thinks both the lady and her story frivolous, and goes away in contemptuous silence.

All that night it is said that Cowper laughed at that tale, and next morning he wrote the ballad of "John Gilpin," which was, perhaps, more well-known in his own day than anything that came from his pen. The wits in all the London coffee houses quoted it, and pretty actresses recited it with many a bewitching smile.

To Lady Austin we owe another bit of Cowper's best work. He was one day discussing with her a subject to write upon in blank verse. "What shall I write upon?" he asked, a little wearily.

"Oh, write upon this sofa," cried the lively lady, making a little imperious motion towards the couch on which she was reclining.

This was the origin of "The Sofa" ("The Task"), his task which she had set him.

There is little doubt that Lady Austin had a very bright influence over Cowper; but the rapidly-growing jealousy between her and Mrs. Unwin compelled Cowper to give up, in some measure, his close intimacy with her. Gratitude for Mrs. Unwin's long-tried affection made him consult her wishes and feelings before anything else.

Another woman, Lady Hesketh, the sister of his early love, Theodora, now came forward to become a power for good in Cowper's life. She managed more prudently than Lady Austin had done, and thus did not excite Mrs. Unwin's jealousy, but was regarded by her as a sympathetic friend. She allowed Lady Hesketh to persuade Cowper to change his place of residence from Olney to a more cheerful home at West Underwood, and her equanimity was not at all disturbed when Lady Hesketh announced that some unknown friend had commissioned her to pay Cowper fifty pounds a year for his life. This friend was, however, in reality no other than Theodora, his old love; but the fact was hidden by her and her sister, for very obvious reasons.

The picture of Cowper's latter years is a very touching picture: such flashes of genius, such struggling against mental disease with brave and constant effort. Mrs. Unwin, too, is a pathetic figure at his side, always at her post in watchful, womanly devotion, caring for him and thinking for him, though age and sickness were laying a heavy hand upon her.

There were, however, some bright points in Cowper's declining days. He was granted a pension of three hundred pounds a year—a strong proof that his genius was looked up to in the land with loving and reverent eyes. He formed also a firm friendship at this period with Hayley, an eminent man of letters of that day; the two being at first drawn together through bringing out, conjointly, an edition of Milton. He had many other faithful, affectionate friends besides, who made it their business to propose to him always fresh subjects on which he might write throughout his life: the best preventive against his attacks of mental disease.

Cowper lived till the year 1800, engaged in literary work till the year before his death. His story is one which teaches brave, manly struggles with mental and bodily suffering, and which proves the sovereign power of religion to calm and sweeten even the most troubled life.

ALICE KING.

AN INCIDENT ON JUBILEE NIGHT.

By H. Fell.

WHAT a good fellow Joe Rayner was, and who knew this so well as his little wife, Marjory! They had been married two years now, and she could truly say that during that time no unkind word had fallen from his lips, and no small kindness towards her had been neglected. But Marjory was a good wife and deserved all the happiness she enjoyed.

The young couple were comfortably enough off for beginners, living in a small, cosy house, some distance out of town, where, with good management, they contrived to give some very neat little dinners to Joe's friends when he brought them down from London. But lately there had been no entertaining at The Hutch, for a small stranger had arrived, and since then Mr. and Mrs. Rayner, as well as the nursemaid, had been fully occupied in entertaining him!

Things were settling down a bit now, for the child, who had been extremely delicate at his birth, was getting stronger. Still he was a wee, fragile-looking creature, and, as his parents leant over his cradle at night and watched his tiny face with its delicate pencilled eyebrows—so unusual in an infant—and its sweet regular features, they each felt, though they would not have said so for worlds, that it would be a difficult task to rear him.

But what love and devotion were they not willing to spend upon him! On the boy's account Marjory, for the first time in her married life, had left her husband and gone to the sea-side with baby for three weeks. On the boy's account they refused a most tempting invitation they could both have accepted, to go for a cruise on the Norfolk Broads; for his sake Marjory watched and waked at night, and—greatest self-sacrifice of all—for his sake Joe gave up smoking in his bedroom or, indeed, anywhere upstairs. He would have given it up altogether if the doctor had suggested that such self-denial could possibly do the youngster any good.

On the evening of the 20th June, 1887, Joe Rayner came back from the office a bit earlier than usual, and going straight up to the nursery, found his wife sitting there on a low stool, the child on her lap, and "Moosie," the favourite large white angora pussy, in her privileged spot on the hearthrug. Joe threw himself down into an arm-chair and said with a sigh of relief:

"Well, I for one am ready enough to rejoice that the Queen has reigned for fifty years, since it means an off-day for me to-morrow."

"Oh, Joe, I am so glad! And now we will have a long morning at home with the boy, and in the afternoon you can take me to the common to see the frolic."

"Or is there any other division of my time you would prefer?" asked honest Joe, smiling at this appropriation.

"Well, it is mine, like everything else that belongs to you," she answered playfully. "Oh, look at the boy, Joe," she went on. "I am sure he knows 'Moosie,' and loves her already."

This was scarcely possible yet awhile. But if he did not love the cat now, doubtless he soon would, for no child could possibly play with her soft, furry coat without getting to love her the moment he was capable of such a sentiment.

It was gloriously fine the next morning, as everyone remembers, and Marjory's plans were carried out to the letter. It may sound a dull way to spend a holiday to some folks, but one has only to be hard worked in a London office to understand the blessedness of absolute idleness on an "off-day" at home. To begin with, Joe came down to breakfast very late indeed; and then he indulged in the additional luxury of loitering over the meal; reading the newspaper and smoking a quiet pipe after as he strolled round the garden with Marjory, who had joined him, bringing the gratifying intelligence that the boy was asleep. After lunch the two walked over together to the common about a mile off, inspected the huge bonfire which was ready to be lighted as soon as it grew dark, and watched the sports of the villagers.

"I think I shall stroll up again after dinner," Joe said. "Shall you be too tired to come too?"

"Perhaps not too tired, but I am going to let the maid go out this evening, so I will stay at home and mind the boy and the house."

"And isn't she proud, too, of having a boy to mind!" laughed Joe. He was always teasing Marjory about her fondness for the child; but all the while, silly fellow, he was every bit as fond of him himself.

On that particular afternoon, when Joe and Marjory came home, the boy looked bonnier than usual. He had just learnt the art of smiling; and as they came into his nursery together, after a race who could get there first, he greeted them with his new smile, and they smiled too, as they clasped him in their arms; and the nurse, with tact, slipped out of the room and left those three alone in all their happiness. What perfect happiness it was!—unalloyed by any prescience of the heavy trouble which was so near at hand. Thank God always for this blessed ignorance; for if coming events *did* cast their shadows before them, then, indeed, the sunshine of our lives would be briefer than that of a December day.

As soon as dinner was over the maid went out, and Joe said he was glad to see her go.

"The way that girl glared at every mouthful I ate, as though she considered me the greediest being in the whole world, was enough to take away any fellow's appetite!"

Joe took things very quietly; but at about half-past eight o'clock he lighted his pipe and strolled up to the common.

Then Marjory was quite alone with her boy. She went up into the nursery and looked at him as he lay asleep in his cradle, with both tiny arms thrown up over his head, an invariable sign with him that he was sound asleep. "Moosie" lay on the hearthrug and was sound asleep too, and Marjory left them both without disturbing them, carefully leaving the door open that she might hear the faintest cry.

It was dark by this time, and when she peeped out of the drawing-room windows before lighting the lamp, she could see a glow in the sky. The Hutch stood on a steep hill, and by going up just to the other end of the garden, not twenty yards away, Marjory would be able to see the bonfire burning on the common. She did not forget her boy, but she knew that no harm could possibly come to him during the few moments she would be away; and so she ran out of the front door, leaving it open behind her.

As she hurried up the path a sudden gust of wind came, and she heard a loud slam. It surely could not be the front door? Instantly turning back again, she reached the door, to find that during her momentary absence it had indeed blown-to, and that now no efforts of hers could possibly avail to open it.

Her feelings baffle description. Her boy was alone within, and she was alone without, unable by any means whatsoever, and however great his need of her, to reach him until her husband returned with the latch-key; for well she remembered that before he started out he had gone round to all the doors and windows in the house, like the careful fellow he was, and seen that they were securely fastened.

Marjory sat down on the doorstep and fairly cried in her distress. Then she went round to the back of the house, and stood beneath the nursery windows. They were tightly closed, and the drawn blinds seemed to shut her off more completely than ever from her darling.

The village clock struck nine. She could scarcely at the earliest expect her husband's return in less than an hour, and if ever time *can* overstep its natural limits and spread itself out indefinitely, surely that hour was abnormally prolonged to Marjory.

She thought once of going down to the village and seeing if she could find a workman who would force the door for her, but it was unlikely that anyone would be at home on that particular night; and, moreover, she could not make up her mind, powerless as she was, to leave the house. She had no wrap of any sort, and she was very cold indeed without being conscious of it, as she stood wearily beneath the nursery window, straining her ears to catch the sound of a cry within. But all was silent.

At length, borne over the common by the night breezes, a faint echo of the strains of the National Anthem reached her, and then

she knew that the amusements were over, and that her husband would surely soon be home. This last quarter of an hour was over at length, and she heard his footstep in the quiet lane. She turned faint and leant against the garden gate for support.

"What, waiting for me out here? Why this is quite lover-like!" said Joe cheerily as soon as he caught sight of her.

"Joe!" and the pain in her voice as she uttered that one word instantly alarmed him. "Joe—let me in—I have been shut out—let me in!"

"But the boy?" asked Joe, hardly grasping the situation, though he fumbled with all haste to find the latch-key.

"He is in the cradle—alone—all alone—this cruel long while!"

Joe had opened the door by this time and Marjory was within. Thank God, all was quiet! And her delicate little child had not screamed himself into convulsions! The colour rushed into her white cheeks as she hurried upstairs, Joe following close behind.

They reached the nursery. Perfect silence reigned there, and nothing seemed to have stirred during Marjory's absence except Moosie, who no longer lay upon her footstool. They paused a moment on the threshold, and a deep-drawn sigh of relief expressed Marjory's thankfulness. Then she crept on tip-toe up to the cradle—how white it looked with its snowy curtains and quilt! But—what was that soft white thing at the head of the cot, instead of the baby's dark-brown hair? Joe caught sight of it at the same instant as Marjory, and forced her on one side.

"What is the matter?" she asked faintly.

Joe stooped lower over the cradle, though he saw too well what had happened. The cat was lying curled right round upon the child's face. He picked the animal up (she was fast asleep) and flung her from him upon the floor; then he bent lower still over the cradle until his face touched the little, white still face lying there. It was quite warm, for Moosie's coat was very thick, but—but——

"Go away, Marjory," he said huskily. "Don't look—my girl."

But she was bending over the cradle by this time. He threw off the coverlet and gently gathered the child in his arms. It was their dead treasure which lay there.

A LITTLE MAID, AN OLD MAID AND THE MAJOR.

By Joyce Darrell.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE WAITING-ROOM.

A MAD rush, a whistle, a slamming of train doors, and the three-thirty for Drayfield started—minus one of its passengers. This was a young lady who had arrived, laden with packages, just one minute too late. She gave a little sigh of resignation and made her way back to the waiting-room, there to get through an hour and a half as well as she could.

It is not a genial, although a most noisy place—the waiting-room of Charing Cross terminus. If you have a headache the perpetual passing to and fro of people is of itself an aggravation. Then the wan light that on an autumn afternoon struggles painfully through the tall and grimy windows gives everybody a sickly and pitiable appearance.

"To think that I must sit here for another hour and a half," thought Maud Carleton dolefully, as yet another individual, making the twenty-fifth in five minutes, bolted through at break-neck speed. "That awful whistle! Such waste of time, too! There is not one of these people that one takes the least pleasure in observing. Here come three more men. Oh! one of them has to wait."

He was a tall, soldierly-looking person of about forty, with a heavy, grizzled moustache and a complexion obviously the worse for tropic suns.

He looked round for a vacant place. There was only one, and that was on the divan next Maud Carleton. She removed her bag to make room for him, and he raised his hat slightly in acknowledgment.

After a few moments, Maud happening to glance sideways at him was struck with the extreme sadness of his air. He did not look sorrowful merely but careworn, as if some deep anxiety were gnawing him. Maud recognised that expression. She had seen it often on a face which she dearly loved, and it roused her quick sympathies.

"Poor man!" she thought. "He wants money, I am sure. An officer apparently. I suppose an Indian officer with debts and a large, sickly family. Perhaps he has a nice face—looks brave. I daresay he fought very well some time, and remained undecorated while other men got everything."

She had reached this point in her conjectures when the object of

them, with a weary, suppressed sigh, drew a letter from his pocket. The address was written very large and stared Maud in the face, "Major Murdoch, 7, Cedar Terrace, W."

Maud gave a great start, and one of her many packages slipped to the ground. She stooped to raise it; and Major Murdoch half mechanically stooped also. He held the letter open now in his hand, and Maud could not help seeing the first line, although she dropped her eyes hastily with a feeling of absolute guilt.

She thanked him for his politeness with a strange thrill in her voice that made him glance at her for the first time.

He saw a pale, sweet wistful little face, with one really beautiful feature in it—a pair of lovely, steadfast blue eyes. They looked at him for a second, then glanced away; but they were fuller of interest and compassion than their owner knew, and Major Murdoch felt slightly troubled. The dusky colour flushed to his cheek as it occurred to him that she had perhaps caught sight of his letter, with its rude opening words which had hurt him like a blow. He did not like to be pitied—no really true and manly nature ever does—and suspecting Maud of such a feeling he felt a shade annoyed with her, but not nearly so much so as if she had been a man—or even an ugly woman. He looked at her again to strengthen his distaste—and the recipe signally failed. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy, but their expression was just as lovely as before—thoughtful, a little mournful, courageous, strangely sweet.

He rose abruptly. It was not nearly time for his train to leave, but he decided to await its starting on the platform. He again raised his hat; but with his eyes firmly downcast. He was determined not to take another glance at his neighbour, and adhered to this determination until he reached the door. Then his eyes were drawn backwards by an irresistible power, and his last look as he vanished met a parting one from Maud Carleton.

She sighed as he went away.

"It would have been unheard of to speak to him, of course, but I wish I could have ventured," she thought. "There are other Murdochs in the world than Jack's, and I daresay many of the name are home on leave at the same time."

Her meditations continued throughout her short and rapid journey to the pretty village where she dwelt. It was a sweet little nook, very full of roses in the summer, and planted with cherry and apple orchards that filled the air with fragrance throughout May and June. A brief walk through these orchards brought you to a wood, where it was pleasant to sit in sunny weather and vainly look for the ever-present, ever-invisible cuckoo. Leafy lanes led past rich meadows, where the kine lay sleeping in the shadow cast by noble oaks and elms. The red-roofed cottages were overgrown with nodding roses, with purple clematis or crimson creeper, according to the season. There was a charming old grey church, with square Norman tower,

where the county families retained their high pews, and where much interest was excited by a quaint tomb on which was the sculptured effigy of a Crusader, the stately dame, his wife, outstretched in stone beside him, while around ran a string course of his kneeling sons and daughters. In warm summer afternoons, while the service proceeded decorously but drowsily, the swallows flying outside backwards and forwards past the windows cast fugitive shadows from their glancing wings on the solemn stone figures.

A sweet nook, sweetest of all naturally in the season when mother earth is fairest; attractive even now on this autumn afternoon when Maud returned to it.

The apple-blossoms were gone, but the fruit hung ruddy on its branches. The swallows had taken wing to lands where the orange scents the air, or mosques lift their snowy domes above the date-tree and the palm.

Maud was glad to be back, and gladder still to perceive, for reasons of her own, that none of her family had come to the Drayfield Station to meet her. She had about half-an-hour's drive between her and home, and her heart beat with the pleasant anticipation that we all feel on returning where we know that a welcome awaits us. Nevertheless, the first place she stopped at was not the pretty building known as Elm Tree Cottage, where she lived with her aunt and a covey of younger brothers and sisters.

As the fly turned into the village she put out her head, and ordered the driver to pull up at the Post-Office.

The post-mistress received her with a smile. She was a bright, gossippy little woman, with one great defect—an insatiable curiosity.

"Good-day, Miss Carleton. So you are back at last! How glad everybody will be to see you! You have been away a fortnight, I think? Yes, a fortnight exactly to-morrow. You enjoyed your holiday, I hope? I am sure you earned it: you work so hard."

There was a slight ring of patronage in these cordial observations, but Maud did not mind. She had a fund of serene earnestness that made her indifferent to the remarks of the world.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Welbrow," she answered, smiling. "I don't work any harder than everybody should do, I think. You are continually busy yourself."

"Thank you, Miss Carleton; you have always a pleasant answer. And did you do much in town? London is so fatiguing! You went to stay with an old school friend, I hear?"

Mrs. Welbrow looked like a dog with its ears erect, so eager was she for information.

"Yes; but she was in recent trouble, so we led a very quiet life. I want to take out some money, Mrs. Welbrow. I have the book with me," and she produced it from her bag.

The post-mistress looked surprised, and, with her, surprise and nquisitiveness were one. Maud habitually deposited her spare cash

at the office ; and on leaving for town had drawn the larger part of her savings. It seemed strange to Mrs. Welbrow that she should want more money immediately on her return, especially as she was generally very prudent.

"How much, Miss Carleton?"

"Ten pounds — in notes, please," and unconsciously Maud blushed. The post-mistress noticed it, for little escaped her eager eyes.

The money brought, Maud put it into an envelope, directed it, and handed it across the counter to be registered. That was a great moment for Mrs. Welbrow, who took full stock of the whole address.

The other little formalities were gone through, and Maud left the Post-Office with her savings diminished to three pounds.

"Who can Major Murdoch be? And why on earth did she need to send him ten pounds?" These were the questions that perplexed Mrs. Welbrow throughout the evening. It was surprising how much she knew of Maud Carleton's affairs and of everybody's. A consistent study of the postmarks and addresses of letters joined to a detective-like instinct had enabled her to amass an amount of information that was curiously exact. She knew that Maud had few intimate correspondents and that those few were mostly women. Once a fortnight or so she received a letter from a brother in India ; and sometimes she had letters from firms or institutions, presumably containing orders.

But Major Murdoch! That was quite a new name. Perhaps he was an admirer whom she had met in London : but then why send him ten pounds? It might be for a commission, of course, but Mrs. Welbrow made a point of never contenting herself with one hypothesis, she liked to go through the whole gamut. And so she did in the present instance, till her head would have ached if it had not been so clear.

Meanwhile, she promised herself to keep a sharp eye on Miss Carleton's future correspondence.

Maud, all unconscious of the mental commotion she had caused, meanwhile proceeded on her way, and in five minutes more had turned into the pretty lane where her home was placed.

As the fly drew up in front of Elm Tree Cottage, eager young faces appeared at the windows ; thence quickly vanished and reappeared instantly in the porch. Boisterous greetings, accompanied by the frantic barkings of two or three dogs ensued, and Maud, in a general confusion of affectionate relatives, smiling servants, and canine friends, was escorted to the parlour, there to be more quietly but not less gladly greeted by her aunt.

A chorus of voices alternately questioned Maud and related the events of the past fortnight. Then, when Maud had taken the first edge off the general curiosity and produced her presents, the younger members of the party dispersed and the dogs followed them.

The group thus reduced to Aunt Hester and her two eldest nieces became much quieter and the conversation flowed more tranquilly.

"Then you had a dull time of it after all! You did not meet anybody interesting?" inquired Edith, whose zest for life was intense, as became her years.

"No," said Maud; but felt that her denial was perhaps not quite sincere, for it was within the bounds of possibility that she had met somebody *very* interesting—somebody who had been a hero to Elm Tree Cottage for two years past.

"Well, *I* have some news," said Aunt Hester, and smiled triumphantly—mysteriously. Maud looked up. Edith's eyes grew big with curiosity.

"Your Aunt Mary told it to me this morning," continued the good lady, and again paused. She liked to make the most of a piece of excitement when she possessed one, being usually in the position of the dullest member of the family, to whom nothing of importance ever happened, the young people opined, and who sat at home and had news poured into her.

"Vine Cottage is let."

"Is that all!" exclaimed Edith in a tone of the keenest disappointment.

"To whom?" inquired Maud, out of politeness chiefly, for she did not like her aunt to be snubbed. But she started, and the blood rushed to the roots of her hair, when she heard the answer.

"To Major Murdoch."

"*Major Murdoch!* Our Major? Jack's friend? Oh! Aunt Hester!" Edith, from whom these rapid exclamations poured, was trembling with excitement.

"You see, even *I* have something to tell of interest sometimes," pursued Aunt Hester. "He came here yesterday to pay a visit to the Bowens: drove over from the Abbey, where he is staying with his sick boy. He saw Vine Cottage, took a fancy to it, and closed with it at once."

Maud listened in silence. Then it could but have been he whom she had seen at the terminus. He must have travelled down in the same train with her, but had not got out at the same station, his destination being further along the line. For a moment she rejoiced.

Then came an awful reflection. The Silcombe post-mark, of which she had never thought till this moment, would reveal whence the money had come! He would set inquiries on foot, question her aunt and uncle, the Bowens perhaps, and eventually discover Maud's identity with his unknown benefactress. What would he think of her? An act which had seemed to her natural an hour before, now appeared heinous, transfigured as it was by the fierce light of Major Murdoch's certain indignation. Poor Maud underwent a perfect agony of regret.

Edith meanwhile was continuing her string of breathless questions.

"What was he like? Was he tall? Short? Fat? Thin? Was the little boy with him? *Why* had Aunt Mary allowed him to go away without bringing him to Elm Tree Cottage?"

"He was in a hurry. The Abbey people had probably made him promise to return there as quickly as possible. They had insisted on his bringing down the sick boy for a change. Poor Major Murdoch!" and Mrs. Sherlock shook her mild head.

"Why do you say 'Poor Major Murdoch,' Aunt Hester?" It was still Edith who questioned.

"He is very unhappy, and has had a sorrowful life. His wife was a bad woman; but we must say no harm of her, for she is dead. None of the children lived except this poor boy, who is deformed in consequence of a fall."

Maud listened to this conversation with mixed feelings of pleasure and pain. She felt very little doubt but that "Jack's Major Murdoch" and her acquaintance of the railway station were identical, and her heart grew warm at the thought. For Jack was her eldest brother: her own special pet, and the hero, pride and joy of the whole family. He had entered the army and gone to India but a few months before the Afghan war, and there had owed his life, on one occasion, to Major Murdoch's self-sacrificing gallantry.

The story, written home by the young soldier himself to Aunt Hester and the brothers and sisters in Elm Tree Cottage, had become a kind of legend round which all that was romantic in their imaginings gathered.

It was a link between their quiet, peaceful lives, and the seething, struggling, outside world. They talked and thought of Jack perpetually, and of his preserver nearly as often, and it is easy to fancy consequently what excitement there was for them in the idea of seeing the latter. Twelve hours previously Maud would have been as pleased as anybody. Now she was disturbed by the thought of the enclosure which she had so precipitately despatched to Cedar Grove.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE VILLAGE POST-OFFICE.

"Aunt Mary," or in other words Mrs. Sherlock's sister, Mrs. Bowen, was received with open arms when she appeared, accompanied by her husband, the next morning at the cottage. They drove over from Barham House, their residence, in their pony-carriage—a comfortable-looking pair, and established themselves cosily for a gossip. Gossip was what they delighted in, being retired Anglo-Indians of the old official stamp, full of fussy good nature dashed by a little pomposity.

Maud was not quite sure that she always liked their patronage, but the children were not so fastidious.

Uncle Henry was generous by nature, and Aunt Mary so by imitation ; a disposition of things that resulted in tips and sugar plums.

"Glad to see you again, Maud. We thought your holiday was going to last for ever, child," cried Mrs. Bowen, as, with a chirpy laugh, she subsided into a seat.

Dr. Bowen settled himself as easily as his gout would allow, stroked his grizzled beard and turned his shrewd, good-natured eyes on his eldest niece. "What news, young woman? Was the visit to town a success? Did you pick up an admirer?"

"Where I am concerned, Uncle Henry, your sole idea is an admirer. I shall have to set one up to please you," said Maud good-humouredly.

"They are not always to be had for the seeking, my dear, and therefore must not be despised when found. Painting screens and tables is all very well, but a good husband and a comfortable home are better. What's this I hear about your refusing the young doctor?"

"Oh, Aunt Hester!" exclaimed Maud, as she glanced reproachfully towards that guilty person.

"Don't attack Aunt Hester. It was natural she should tell me. And of course I told Uncle Henry," said Mrs. Bowen.

"And we are come to have it out with you, Maudie, girl," continued the doctor. "Be sensible, my child, and think twice before you throw away such a chance."

"But I don't like him," said Maud.

"Oh, indeed! He has red hair, perhaps? or doesn't play the guitar? I have only seen him once, but he struck me as a tall, well-enough-looking fellow ; and I hear he is good at his profession. What more do you require?" urged the old gentleman more seriously.

"Perhaps Maud is waiting for a duke," suggested Aunt Mary.

"Bob and I want her to marry Major Murdoch," suddenly interposed Effie's fresh, childish treble.

A pause of amazement : a violent blush from Maud : a loud laugh from Dr. Bowen and his wife.

"Murdoch? Poor Arthur Murdoch? Marry a Greenwich pensioner at once, child! You would be just as well set up!" exclaimed Uncle Henry.

"Effie's a naughty child," said Mrs. Sherlock, in mild horror. "How could Maud think of marrying a person she has never seen?"

"I cannot understand why Major Murdoch's name should be introduced into our conversation," exclaimed Maud. She spoke with a certain vehemence unusual to her, and the colour rose hotly in her cheeks.

"Hoity-toity!" commented Mrs. Bowen, while Bobby exclaimed : "Well, you needn't be cross! Miss Dodson says you write to him."

"*Miss Dodson!*" The exclamation, in tones of extreme surprise, broke simultaneously from Maud and Mrs. Sherlock. Miss Dodson was the sister of the young doctor whose suit the Bowens had been urging, and of all people in Silcombe she was the very last who would be likely to know Maud's private affairs.

"Bobbie, you talk too fast," said Mrs. Sherlock, shaking her head reprovingly at the delinquent.

"I don't; do I, Effie? Didn't she say it, just now, in the road? And weren't we going to ask Maud all about it?"

Effie corroborating these surprising statements, all the juvenile eyes were directed towards Maud in inquiry. She turned pale, but remained resolutely silent. Dr. and Mrs. Bowen began to look very alert and knowing; but, fortunately for her eldest niece, Mrs. Sherlock had but one sentiment—an angry incredulity.

"I call it most impertinent of Miss Dodson! I shall write to her to say that she is quite mistaken, and beg her to give me her authority," said the good lady.

"Better let the matter be, Hetty," observed Dr. Bowen.

"Never ask for explanations. That's always our principle, isn't it, Henry?"

"Well—it's mine, my dear," replied the doctor, drily.

"We have had a delightful drive," said Mrs. Bowen, addressing her sister. "You will never guess where we have been: to the cemetery—the new one beyond Drayfield. And we have chosen a piece of ground—a sweet spot, where our friends won't mind coming, even in wet weather: it is so high."

"Your friends!" echoed Mrs. Sherlock, in gentle bewilderment, her mind not being rapid.

"To visit our graves. I hope you will all come from time to time," continued Mrs. Bowen hospitably, as she rose to wrap herself snugly in her furs. "We should be sorry to think you meant to forget all about us as soon as we were put away, my old man and I. Well, good-bye, Hester! Good-bye, little people! Don't fret if the answer to your letter is long in coming, Maud."

And, pleased with this final little joke, Mrs. Bowen smilingly waddled out, ensconced herself and helped to ensconce her husband in the pony carriage, and, with many nods and hand-wavings, was driven away.

"Aunt Hetty," said little Effie, solemnly, a few minutes later, "when Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry are put away, will you go to see them often?"

"I daresay I shall, love. It will be my great consolation. Only I think it very likely that your dear uncle and aunt will follow me to my last home, instead of my following them," concluded Mrs. Sherlock in a tone of pleasing melancholy, for she was slightly hypochondriacal and fond of alluding to her imminent end.

Effie was a sweet, spiritual-looking child with wonderful, dreamy

eyes and a cloud of finest golden curls that encircled her brow like an aureole. She was six, and precocious in mind, but very small and slender. She had the prettiest clinging ways with those she loved—and seemed to possess an inexhaustible store of elfin caresses. Maud she worshipped, and nestled in her arms now, as being the place of all others where she felt herself most at home.

Her mother died in giving her birth, and Maud, already then sixteen and the eldest but one of a family of eight, had stood her far more in lieu of that lost parent than the amiable but slightly incapable Aunt Hester could have done.

For Maud had early learned to be grave and strong—early began to think for others. Her father, whom she loved very dearly, and who died only a month or two before his wife—had been a charming but impecunious man, always in need of sympathy and rarely failing to obtain it. The blighting presence of poverty shadowed all Maud's childhood; but she soon laid its lessons of discipline to heart. Love surrounded her in abundance: and love to weak natures is sometimes a corrosive; but Maud's strong heart and brave spirit only gained from it a deeper capacity for responsive tenderness and ungrudging help.

And now on her little sister she lavished a wealth of affection and watchfulness as requisite as they were wise.

"Maudie, put by those horrid paints and let us go for a walk—just you and me," said Effie coaxingly.

This was a request often proffered but not always granted, at least in winter, when Maud had need of the whole brief day for her painting, and generally only went out by owl's light. On this particular occasion, however, feeling a little restless, she charmed Effie by assent. The child as an additional element of enjoyment suggested that she should wear her new pelisse, which was a recent present from Maud.

It was trimmed with sealskin, and worn with a little sealskin cap, was ravishingly becoming to Effie's small, wistful and delicately-tinted face.

They started off presently, the child holding fast by Maud's hand and chattering gaily. She had a clear, musical voice, a little shrill, such as one might imagine some silver trumpet in Elfland to be; and made very quaint, unexpected observations, so that her society was delightful.

On their way they had occasion to stop at the Post-Office, which being also a kind of general shop was the most frequented place in the village.

Mrs. Welbrow was delighted to see them, but Maud greeted her rather coldly, and showed even less disposition to chat than usual. She could not help feeling with some resentment that if Miss Dodson really did know of her writing to Major Murdoch it could only be through the gossip of the Post-mistress.

While she was briefly giving an order, who should enter upon the scene but Miss Dodson herself. She was to be seen in the shop twenty times a day, having an inordinate love of talking, and condescending therefore to be quite a crony of the Post-mistress's.

She was a worldly-minded old maid, years older than her brother, the young doctor and Maud's lately-rejected suitor. Whilst prepared to detest any woman whom her brother should eventually marry, she yet, inconsistently, was outraged at Maud's impertinence in refusing him.

But she had no intention of quarrelling. That would have shut her out of Mrs. Sherlock's house; and to be shut out from any house was grief to Miss Dodson.

"Oh, Miss Carleton! So you ree back. Indeed, I heard you had returned yesterday. However little of a gossip one may be, it is difficult to avoid hearing everything in Silcombe."

"Sometimes even more than is quite correct," said Maud icily.

"Yes, indeed, you are right there. But in that case one requires to be a gossip. Now you never gossip, I am sure, and no more do I. Three yards of navy blue serge, if you please, Mrs. Welbrow. I hope your husband is better? Yes? So glad. As I was saying, Miss Carleton, the irrepressible chattering that goes on in these small places is my abhorrence. When people come to me for news I always say: Don't ask *me*. Ask So-and-So. I never know anything for I ask no questions. You had a dull time in town, I hear. Were with a friend in grief. An *old* friend?"

"A school friend."

"Oh! a school —— Married?"

"Yes."

"A professional man's wife, I presume?" Then as Maud did not answer: "Of course in that case you would not be likely to go much into society. I daresay your friend lives in a very quiet way. Now, when I go to town I plunge in a vortex of gaiety. But you made Major Murdoch's acquaintance, I hear?"

"You heard so? From whom?" and Maud fixed her blue eyes steadily on Miss Dodson's face. It remained unabashed, however, although its owner had expected another result to her observation.

"This little lady here told me," she replied promptly, indicating Effie.

"O—h!" cried Effie. "What a big story! You told me."

Miss Dodson hated children, but had an idea that they could be made useful as scapegoats on occasion. She sometimes found, however, that in trusting to them for such a part, she leaned on a broken reed. This was the case now, and she turned purple with annoyance.

"Your memory is short, little Missy, but your tongue is long," she said with a rude laugh.

"You *did* tell me," re-asserted Effie, when Maud interposed.

"Hush, Effie! It is not polite to contradict in that way. Miss Dodson is mistaken, but you must tell her so quietly."

"Mistaken? When I——" Miss Dodson pulled up. She had been on the point of betraying the source of her information. "Do you mean to assert, Miss Carleton, that you do *not* know Major Murdoch—*the* Major Murdoch who has taken Vine Cottage?"

"Certainly I do. I have never exchanged a word with him. Except from hearsay, he is a perfect stranger to me, and to every member of my family in England. So much I have to say in answer to your questions, Miss Dodson. But as to the propriety of such a cross-examination on your part, you must allow me to remark that there may be two opinions," replied Maud with spirit.

"There *is* Major Murdoch," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Welbrow, who for reasons of her own had been longing to stop Miss Dodson's tongue.

"Come, Effie, let us go," said Maud, who turned pale with mingled feelings on recognising in the gentleman who had just driven up her chance acquaintance of the day before.

Major Murdoch descended from the pony-carriage, then turned to address some observation to a pale little boy—presumably his son—who occupied the other seat. Thus he had his back towards Maud, who hoped to slip past him unobserved. But he turned round just a minute too soon, and started perceptibly on seeing the young lady. Instinctively he raised his hat. Maud felt it rather than saw it for her eyes were cast down; but she responded with the least little bend of her head. It was enough for the lynx eyes watching her. Miss Dodson and Mrs. Welbrow, exchanged a scandalised glance, and the former's lips noiselessly shaped the one word "Shameless!"

Major Murdoch had come to buy stamps. This purchase completed, he said: "Would you tell me exactly where Elm Tree Cottage is? Sherlock, I think, is the name of the lady living there."

"The second turn to the right; third house on the left," said Mrs. Welbrow; then added affably: "That was Miss Carleton, Mrs. Sherlock's niece, who passed you this minute."

"That Miss Carleton?"

The Major seemed surprised, interested, pleased. He even moved a step towards the door and looked after Maud's vanishing figure. Miss Dodson waited breathless, as did also Mrs. Welbrow. Would Major Murdoch say anything to enlighten them? But he did not: he stood at the door in an absent-minded sort of way that was provokingly inscrutable.

But if virtue is its own reward sometimes, curiosity is so very often. The Major asked for a post-card, and drew out a pocket pen. Miss Dodson's eyes sparkled and an answering gleam flashed from Mrs. Welbrow's. The Major wrote a few lines; then an address. Miss Dodson, on pretence of glancing over a book on the counter,

took a look out of the tail of her eye at the post-card. The colour rose in her cheeks, and Mrs. Welbrow felt consoled for being able to see nothing herself by the conviction that her ally had seen something. The Major said "Good-day" civilly, bowed slightly, and getting again into the carriage, drove off in the direction of Elm Tree Cottage.

"The post-card was directed to Cedar Grove, to Mary Something —perhaps a servant," exclaimed Miss Dodson. "So it *is* the same Major Murdoch."

Mrs. Welbrow assented, but not quite so eagerly as usual. She was beginning to regret a little that she had allowed so much to be wormed out of her.

"That girl is *shameless!*" commented Miss Dodson. "I hate to be deceived—don't you, Mrs. Welbrow?"

"I do, indeed, Miss Dodson. But what motive can Miss Carleton have for such duplicity? The Major seemed sincere in his surprise on learning her name."

"Oh! you never can tell. Simple-minded people like ourselves have no idea of the wickedness of the world. Doubtless Miss Carleton has been masquerading under some assumed name. It's all as clear as noonday. The very way he bowed was enough to show the terms they are on. My poor brother! He has had an escape indeed. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Welbrow. Pray step over whenever you want anything for your husband. I shall always be glad to see you, for I lead a sort of owl's life down here."

And Miss Dodson started off to pay her daily visit to her dear friend Miss Tippany.

Maud and Effie had a charming ramble, and returned home laden with autumn treasures in the shape of hips and haws and lovely clusters of berries. Alfy and Bobby tumbled out to meet them on their return, both shouting together, "Guess who's been here! Guess who's been here!" then, performing a sort of war dance, accompanied them in mysterious silence to the drawing-room.

"Guess whom we have had!" exclaimed Edith eagerly.

"Yes, guess," said Aunt Hester. Then three voices together: "Major Murdoch and little Paul."

"We saw him, too," said Effie. "He took off his hat. I wanted Maud to speak to him, but she wouldn't. It was at the door of the Post-Office."

"At the Post-Office? Then nobody introduced him to you? Then why did he bow? He does not know you, Maud," said Edith, whose sharpness was sometimes distressing.

"He only raised his hat because he had to pass by me."

"Oh, no, Maudie! He knew you. He wanted to speak; but you wouldn't. You *blushed!*" said Effie solemnly.

"She's blushing now!" exclaimed Alfy and Bobby together.

"You never have met him anywhere before, have you, Maud?"

questioned Mrs. Sherlock, who, in reality the most simple-minded of women, was suspicious by fits from sheer inability to sift evidence.

"How should I?" retorted poor Maud, irritably. Unluckily, irritability in her being an unusual phenomenon attracted an immense amount of attention, and she was nearly stared out of countenance. It was more than she could bear, and she abruptly left the room.

Mrs. Sherlock shook her head; then gently sighed. Extremely amiable by nature, her general attitude was nevertheless one of mild aggrievedness. And sometimes she indulged in the little mental dissipation of thinking that her nephews and nieces did not behave towards her as nicely as they should have done. The idea—perhaps because there was no reality in it—gave her a meek and secret satisfaction.

Major Murdoch had driven over from the Abbey to show Vine Cottage to his little son; then called at Elm Tree Cottage, because he had learnt from the Bowens of the existence of his friend Jack's aunt and sisters. He had sat some time listening to stories of the young officer's childhood and youth, and responding to them politely. He was "very grave and quiet, but nice." That was the verdict pronounced on him by Edith, Alfy and Bobby, and dinned all the evening into Maud's ears.

"We told him you were out, and would be so sorry not to have seen him; but he did not say he had met you," said Edith, with an inquisitive stare, Effie's revelations having sunk into a fertile soil, and yielded a fine crop of conjectures.

"How should he know who I was?" Maud retorted, but, alas! again with that fatal blush. This time it was patent even to Mrs. Sherlock.

"Well, if he bowed ——"

"Oh, that bow! How can you listen to Effie's chatter? I tell you that until you mentioned me, he had probably never even heard of my existence," said Maud, adding, with unnecessary earnestness: "And do let us talk of something else. I am sick of the sound of Major Murdoch's name!"

This was such a heresy that it landed everybody high and dry upon a rock of speechlessness; and Maud had peace for the rest of that evening.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

Any new arrival at Silcombe furnished food for much superfluous comment, and Major Murdoch proved no exception to the rule. He installed himself in Vine Cottage in the course of a week, and immediately afterwards several particulars, more or less veracious, oozed out about him. They were, on the whole, vaguely unfavour-

able: Miss Dodson took care of that. She had, so to speak, adopted his reputation, and was doing her best to spoil it, moved thereunto partly by an artistic love of scandal for its own sake, partly by dislike of Maud. She had got hold of an idea that if she threw enough mud at the Major, some of it would glance off upon Miss Carleton; so she pelted with a will.

"Major Murdoch was very poor;" "Quite in shady circumstances, in fact;" "Suspected of debt;" "Separated from his wife;" "No, a widower, but of recent make;" "Had been a bad husband, not a doubt of that;" "Looked depressed;" "Had an air of shabby gentility;" "Kept only a maid-of-all-work;" "Very odd!"

These were the remarks that floated about; and it availed nothing that several patent facts concerning the Major were directly or inferentially favourable. As, for example, that he was a gallant officer, a gentleman by birth, a most devoted father. These things won him no indulgence; for country gossip is of a very capricious order, and at the mercy of every wind that blows. Miss Dodson, in this instance, had started it in one particular direction, and there it set.

One thing that helped to offend people was Major Murdoch's extreme reserve. He politely waived most efforts at acquaintance, and seemed inclined to know nobody but the Bowens and the inhabitants of Elm Tree Cottage. Now, it so happened that Maud, who was, so to speak, the representative member of the latter family, was not profoundly popular. Commonplace people admired her appearance and her intelligence, and felt her distinction; but they did not take to her warmly. They spoke well of her until somebody spoke ill, and then they were delighted to follow suit.

Some of the comments upon the Major had reached Mrs. Sherlock's ears, and made her vaguely uncomfortable.

She was very much influenced by the world's opinions, having none but acquired ones of her own And she began to wonder whether Major Murdoch was a fit person for herself and "the children" (as she called the young people) to know. When she consulted her eldest niece, matters were only made worse; for Maud was fiercely opposed to the notion of Major Murdoch's being treated with anything but the warmest gratitude and friendliness.

Mrs. Sherlock was already a little suspicious: this made her more so. She secretly conversed with the Bowens on the subject. They knew "no harm of poor Arthur Murdoch;" but admitted that he seemed even poorer than his notoriously straitened means could account for.

In the meanwhile, the Major, always made vociferously welcome by the majority in Elm Tree Cottage, came there with tolerable frequency, and, being something of an artist, showed interest in the progress of Maud's screens and fans. He paid her no special attention, however, but proved himself invariably grave, if genial; and although he would talk on occasions, it was clearly not his nature to

be either lively or loquacious. Maud, on her part, was always a little constrained and uncomfortable in his presence. The sense of her guilt and the fear of detection combining to weigh her down.

The children got on better. Paul, in spite of his four years' advantage in age, condescended to become friends with Effie, and allowed himself to be patronised by Alfy and Bobby. He was a nice child—very quiet and thoughtful. He had a sweet, rare smile, which would come into his eyes suddenly at the end of a long spell of listening, and indicated the fullest measure of insight into speech and speaker. There was something very sprite-like about this smile, for it seemed to imply that Paul knew much more than anybody suspected.

Between him and his father there existed a silent and undemonstrative, but most touching affection. Paul had endured much pain through all his small length of life, and, although slowly improving, he still suffered at intervals. But a word from his father always seemed to soothe him. In his worst moments, if the Major entered, the child's wan face would brighten ; and always, when the paroxysm subsided, he would drop peacefully to sleep if only his little hand rested in the strong one that held it as tenderly as a woman's.

This love was so absorbing, and had been so intensified by the circumstances of his lonely, invalid life, that Paul had hitherto cherished few other affections, and known hardly any friends. The people at the Abbey were kind to him ; and what was more, he instinctively felt that they loved his father ; therefore he was quietly grateful to them, but never unclosed his heart to them. He was visibly drawn towards Maud, however ; and in another way, also towards Effie, perhaps because both—one in womanly, the other in childish fashion—possessed the rare tact that comes of sympathetic insight.

A chief amusement that he shared with Effie was to make Maud recite Browning's " Pied Piper," and the part which interested him especially was that which related to the lame boy's disappointment at not having been able to follow his playmates into the wondrous cavern.

" I should have been shut out, too," he suddenly remarked one day to Effie.

The colour flushed to her cheeks. She had often made a similar reflection and confided it to Maud ; but never would the fineness of her feeling have permitted her to hint at it to Paul himself. Her first impulse now was to console.

" He was such a *foolish* boy to mind," she said severely. " Of course there were lots of nice things left in the town—all the other children's toys for instance."

" Oh ! I shouldn't have cared at being left behind," said Paul. " Papa says I must never mind about being lame, as legs don't really matter if you have brains."

Effie was seated on a low stool, with her elbows on her knees, and her pretty pointed chin on her hands. Paul's speech was of a nature to plunge her into meditation for some seconds.

"Have you brains?" she inquired at last with great earnestness and sincerity.

"Oh, yes. I'm going to be a literary man."

"What's that?"

"A fellow who writes books. What a goosey you are not to know that!"

"I'm only a little girl. I can't know everything," said Effie. "When I grow up I shall paint like Maudie."

"Oh, that's stupid. It's much better to write books. I mean to make thousands and *thousands* of pounds."

"What for?"

"To give papa."

"Is he poor, then—your papa?"

"Yes, very. And he has to spend so much for me, and for something else."

"What else?"

"I don't know. He says he'll tell me some day when I'm big."

"That won't be for months and months."

"Why, of course not. Not for three or four years even."

"I'll tell Maudie that he's poor. She makes money sometimes. She could give him some."

"I don't think he would like that," said Paul, doubtfully. "Somebody sent him ten pounds 'anonymously' the other day, and it vexed him so! He would have sent the money back, but there wasn't any address, and he had thrown the envelope into the fire when he tore it off, and so he couldn't even find out the post mark. The people would have been finely punished if he had discovered them—I can tell you," the boy concluded grandly.

That night when Maud was putting Effie to bed she was much startled to hear her announce that she intended, the next time she saw him, to give Major Murdoch the two half-crowns out of her savings-box, but that she must be careful not to do it "anonermously" as that would vex him.

"Why?" said Maud, flushing uncomfortably in an agony of apprehension.

Thereupon Effie proceeded to repeat Paul's story almost word for word, but when she reached the episode of the burnt envelope and its consequences, she suddenly broke off with a little silvery laugh, for Maud gave her such a sudden, fervent hug that she took it for the beginning of a game at kisses: and it was some time afterwards before she could be persuaded to go to sleep.

The knowledge that her impulsive, and as she now was fain to admit unwise, act of generosity had not been found out, lifted a weight from Maud's spirit, and made her manner towards the Major

more frankly, if still rather shyly, cordial. But his towards her remained unaltered. He was kind—interested even to a certain extent—but austerely reserved.

Miss Dodson noticed it, of course, on the few occasions when she saw them together and drew her own conclusions. "They are acting a part," she informed Miss Tippany, "but the girl is evidently growing tired of it. She begins to show her feelings more than she has any idea of. Probably she cares for him much more than he does for her—the designing minx."

"Poor mamma always said that girls should never show their feelings," observed Miss Tippany. "Men used to follow her from town to town, but she never encouraged them by so much as a glance."

"Dear me!" said Miss Dodson with a yawn. "What a pity some of them can't rise from their graves and transfer their attentions to you." (That will stop her with her eternal "poor mamma," was her mental comment on this cruel speech.) But Miss Tippany bridled.

"I can assure you, Miss Dodson, that you are mistaken if you imagine me not to have had as many chances as other girls. But poor mamma always felt that compared with her blood poor papa's was a little inferior; and so——"

"Yes—yes, I understand. I daresay you might have married an archbishop or a duke if you had liked. Good gracious! there's a fly drawn up at Major Murdoch's door, and a woman inside it. Well-dressed too! I *never!* Yes—you may ring, madam, but you won't get in. The Major's gone to the Abbey and taken the child with him, and the maid's off on a holiday."

The lady had descended from the cab and was standing in the road gazing in a bewildered way up and down it. She was elegantly but not very tidily dressed, and looked delicate, even from the distance at which Miss Dodson was viewing her.

"I think I will just step over and tell her the Major is away. It will only be good-natured, although I daresay she's no better than she should be." And Miss Dodson prepared to depart.

"Pray be careful! These improper people are often so rude. Not that I know it from having spoken to even one of them, of course; but poor papa used to tell poor mamma——"

An energetic bang of the front-door cut short the stream of Miss Tippany's reminiscences. She could only clasp her hands in feeble deprecation (directed, perhaps, to the shades of her maternal ancestors) and watch Miss Dodson's proceedings.

That energetic lady stepped briskly across the road and addressed the stranger abruptly.

"Major Murdoch is out," she said. "He won't be back, I believe, until to-morrow morning."

The new-comer looked disappointed, for which Miss Dodson was

unfeignedly grateful to her. For an exhibition of feeling always furnished the presumption that she was on the right trail, and possibly about to run her game to earth.

"You are, perhaps, his sister?" she continued affably. "I understood the Major to say that he was expecting a sister."

"What nonsense!" said the lady rather irritably. "He hasn't any sister," and she glanced at Miss Dodson with some contempt. That lady invariably flourished under contempt, and put forth sprouts of cringing. As a necessary concomitant, her new acquaintance rose in her esteem—she no longer had any doubt but that she was a lady.

"Very likely I am mistaken," she exclaimed with an obsequious smile. "I never gossip or mix myself up with my neighbours' affairs. What little I do hear I make a point of forgetting; so how should I know whether the Major had sisters or not?"

The stranger made no reply. She was twitching nervously at a glove which she held in one hand, and seemed absorbed in annoyance.

"Who *can* she be?" Miss Dodson asked herself in an agony of curiosity. The lady had on a wedding ring, so the most likely supposition seemed to be that she was a runaway wife. This pregnant idea made Miss Dodson's pulses bound. What food for gossip if the conjecture proved true! A scandal in high life—perhaps a divorce suit—and the Major even wickeder than Silcombe thought him! Miss Tippany had flattened her nose against the window-pane of her sitting-room, and the sight of her in this attitude spurred Miss Dodson on to further investigation.

"Perhaps you could wait," she suggested blandly.

"I shall certainly wait," was the reply, delivered with rather a harsh laugh. "I am not going back without seeing him, that's certain. And I'm so tired!" She looked it. Her cheeks, indeed, were red and her eyes bright, but both the flush and the brilliancy were hectic.

She was thin and fragile-looking to the last degree, and her hands painfully wasted. But she was still young, and there was an air of great refinement and elegance about her.

"May I offer you my house for an hour or two?" said Miss Dodson. "Later, if Major Murdoch has not returned, my brother—Dr. Dodson, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh—could find you a room for the night."

The lady looked at her: hesitated a moment: then accepted. She dismissed the cabman and accompanied Miss Dodson, who had obsequiously seized her bag and was disappointed to find no initials on it, into the house.

She was barely seated before a fit of coughing came on, which left her in a condition of exhaustion alarming to behold. Miss Dodson, fairly scared, flew for wine, and had no difficulty in inducing her guest to drink two brimming bumpers. After this she revived a little, and Miss Dodson beheld a prospect of reward. Dexterous

cross-questioning might elicit a great deal, she felt, and set to work at once.

"You seem rather an invalid?" she remarked sympathetically.

"It's a case of creaking doors," said the lady. "I believe I ought to have died years ago; but I daresay I shall disappoint both doctors and friends for some time yet."

She spoke feebly, for her voice was nearly gone; but there was a slight ring of viciousness in her words, sufficient to make Miss Dodson prick up her ears.

"Everyone must feel delighted to be thus disappointed. Your brother——. How stupid I am! I think you said Major Murdoch is *not* your brother?"

"No."

Miss Dodson gave a little cough. "A great friend, then?"

"No." Then after a second's pause, as if impelled to say more, the stranger added with an odd smile: "There is scant friendship between us and still less love."

Miss Dodson's eyes nearly started out of her head.

"Tell me something about Major Murdoch," resumed the lady "Is he liked in this place?"

"Really you could hardly come for information on such points to a worse person than myself. I live here for the sake of my dear brother, and although acquaintances are forced on me, I have no intimates and gossip I abhor——"

"Nonsense."

Miss Dodson, who had repeated her formula mechanically, stared with an air of slight bewilderment for an instant, then continued. "This is a sad chattering place, and people will talk about their neighbours' affairs. Generally what I hear goes in one ear and out of the other. But since you ask me about Major Murdoch, I may say that report declares him to have a special attraction in Silcombe."

"An attraction! What attraction? A woman?" The stranger sat bolt upright with blazing eyes.

"Of course," said the enchanted Miss Dodson briskly. "A young girl, *not* very nice, I think; but my taste is fastidious. However, the gentlemen see a great deal in her, which is, doubtless, what she cares most for. I must confess that even to my unobservant eyes the Major seems immensely fascinated."

"What is her name?" asked the lady huskily. She was shaking from head to foot with unmistakable fury, and Miss Dodson began to feel a little uneasy. Under such circumstances it was a relief to her to hear a ring at the front-door.

"My brother, probably," she said, springing up. "He will be delighted to make your acquaintance. Poor fellow! Silcombe is not what he has been accustomed to. The society of the place so empty-headed and——"

The door opened to admit Miss Tippany, who, able to bear the

pangs of ungratified curiosity no longer, had stepped over "to beg for a skein of wool."

She sat down, looking at the stranger inquisitively, and calmly disregarding the scowl with which Miss Dodson had signified her displeasure at the intrusion.

"Introduce me," said Miss Tippany, sotto voce, as she noted the unknown one's elegant attire, and carefully threw back the bonnet strings which obscured "poor mamma's" portrait mounted as a brooch.

The lady carelessly nodded in acknowledgment of the introduction. Then turning her back on poor Miss Tippany with as little ceremony as she would have bestowed on a window-pane, she said impatiently: "You have not told me that girl's name."

"The name of Major Murdoch's *belle passion?* Really, I hardly know if I should be justified —— Miss Tippany will tell you how all her curiosity never elicits a word of gossip from me."

"*My* curiosity, Miss Dodson? Upon my word, you have the strangest notions! Poor mamma—one of the Delagommes of Sark, a name, I fancy, not *quite* unknown in the best circles ——"

"I must go to this girl: take me to her. I have something to tell her. Good heavens, woman, don't sit staring at me in that way! Either finish the statement your slanderous tongue has begun, or take me where I can hear the truth."

The lady had risen, and was standing over the petrified Miss Dodson. With her shrunken frame, trembling all over, her eyes glittering, her breath coming in quick, agonised gasps, she presented a pathetic spectacle of fury made impotent by weakness.

Miss Dodson was frightened, and she hated to be frightened: it made her rude at once.

"Who *are* you?" she exclaimed coarsely. "What is Major Murdoch to you, I should like to know? If you think you will make a cat's-paw of me, you are much mistaken, I can tell you. I asked you in here out of kindness, and I was a fool for my pains. There's the door, madam: you'll be so good as to walk through it at once."

A shriek from Miss Tippany interrupted her. The lady had staggered backwards, and now fell in a heap to the ground. They rushed to her, and on raising her head found that a thin stream of blood was trickling slowly from her mouth. Miss Tippany, frightened out of her wits, began to wring her hands and sob. Miss Dodson was half-demented with rage, but she kept her presence of mind, and hastened to apply such remedies as she could think of. The stranger opened her eyes at last, but remained speechless, and the bleeding increased. Presently her gaze became fixed and glassy, and then even Miss Dodson nearly lost her head. She had sent in hot haste for her brother; and presently, to her infinite relief, he arrived. The lady had again lost all consciousness, and was lying, as her hostess viciously expressed it, "like a log of wood." At his

first glance towards her, Dr. Dodson's expression changed. He approached her quickly, felt her pulse, listened to her heart, then curtly asked for a mirror and held it to her lips. "She is dead!" he announced.

"*Dead!*" Miss Dodson's voice rose to a consternated shriek. "And what on earth am I to do with her?"

"Who is she?" asked the doctor.

"How should I know? She forced herself in here to wait for Major Murdoch. I daresay she was no better ——"

"Hush!" cried Miss Tippany, and fell to sobbing again, the nervous, soft-hearted thing.

For once in her life, and for one brief moment, Miss Dodson looked a little abashed. Somehow, a rebuke from so flabby a nature as Miss Tippany's seemed to affect her more than any sterner protest could have done.

Dr. Dodson, feeling very angry with the Major, of whom, as a reputed rival, he was not unwilling to think ill, went off to despatch a telegram to the Abbey; while Miss Tippany, assisted by a servant, proceeded to render some of the last services that the living can bestow on the dead.

The corpse was laid out and covered with such flowers as the season yielded, when the Major, looking very white and stern, drove up.

Dr. Dodson received him, and gave him the only explanation he could furnish. "A stranger—wished to wait—evidently the final stage of consumption—fatigued by the journey," and so on.

Major Murdoch listened in silence, betraying no surprise and no violent emotion. When asked to look at the body, he silently bent his head.

Miss Dodson and her brother accompanied him upstairs to the darkened room, suddenly become so solemn, where the dead woman lay. Miss Tippany, who was standing by the bed, turned the light of a candle upon the wax-like, wasted features; but even then the Major did not speak immediately.

"You know her?" questioned the doctor at last.

"Yes," said Arthur Murdoch gravely. "She was my wife."

(To be concluded.)

HAP AND MISHAP.

By C. J. Langston.

THE lively interest with which an article published under the above title was received four years ago, induces me to give a few more of my humorous clerical experiences and illustrative gatherings to the readers of the Argosy.

Churches have been turned inside out since I was a boy; and arrangements connected with the service completely altered, not always with advantage.

Who does not remember the great West Gallery and the imposing organ in the background, with the motley minstrels, and little Benjamin, their ruler, striving dexterously to hang an oblong slate on a nail in a panel in front, whereon was set forth in chalky hieroglyph, the number and first line of the hymn? What quaint spelling have I seen; such as, "The Dismussal him," "Sarm, number foretine" (after a sleepy sermon); with such strange perversions as, "Shure wicked fools must need reppose," "Defend me, Lord, for shame." Sometimes, owing to unskilful fingers, the slate would come crashing down, testing the superior solidity of the bucolic skull; sometimes it would be placed wrong side uppermost, or present a blank to the congregation, which sorely perplexed the old clerk at Upton Snodsbury. Twice he sedately repeated the formula, "Let us sing," and then, jerking off his spectacles, he exclaimed petulantly, "Turn the boord, Jack, hoot!"

A predecessor of mine at B. prided himself upon his singers. "What a gush of euphony voluminously wells," from the violin, the piccolo, the bassoon. He was glad of the help of strangers, and would announce, after the second lesson, "I see some musical friends from Redditch have come in, so that we will have an anthem presently." The custom then was to repeat lines and syllables ad nauseam, but often with ludicrous effect. Thus, "Call down Sal," was thrice repeated before the full word salvation was reached; and the line, "Oh Thou to whom all creatures bow," was spun out until it resembled bow-wow-wow-wow. Miss Charlotte Yonge alludes to the custom in Chantry House: "There was an outburst of bassoon, clarionet and fiddle, and the performance that followed was the most marvellous we had ever heard, especially when the big butcher, fiddling all the time, declared in a mighty solo, 'I am Jo-Jo-Jo-Joseph!' and having reiterated this information four or five times, inquired with equal pertinacity, 'Doth my fa-a-u-ther yet live?'"

Does the Reverend L. C. ever call to mind the occasion when, as a wild Irish curate, he entered a Warwickshire church late, and the

prolonged tuning up of wheezy instruments abruptly ceased upon his vociferous exclamation, "Sthop that feedle!"

Speaking of curates, I remember that singularly uninteresting man, Bishop Jacobson, remarking to my incumbent, who had expressed regret at my leaving: "You find the market for curates rather tight, don't you?" The truth is that curates are better off than half the incumbents at the present day, whose income too much resembles that of a vicar in Cumberland in 1832:—"Fifty shillings per annum, a new surplice, a pair of clogs, and feed on the common for one goose." One is almost sorry that the old act of Elizabeth is not in force, which allowed incumbents whose benefices did not exceed twelve pounds per annum to follow some trade. Curates, even in the time of Wickliff, had £3 6*s.* 8*d.* per annum; and the Mess-Johns and Trencher-chaplains at the houses of the squires, during last century, had a merry time of it, although the pay was but £26 a-year.

If the singing-gallery was a feature in the churches of fifty years ago, so was the square, spacious, and eminently comfortable family pew. Such is well described by Jane Welsh Carlyle, during her visit to the Bullers at Troston Rectory. "'It is a nice pew that of ours,' said old Mr. Buller; 'it suits me remarkably well; for being so deep I am not overlooked; and in virtue of that, I read most part of the Femme de Qualité this morning. But don't,' he added, 'tell Mr. Regy (his son, the Rector) this.' I, also," continues Mrs. Carlyle, "turned the depth of the pew to good account. When the sermon began, I made myself at the bottom of it a sort of Persian couch, out of the praying cushions, laid off my bonnet, and stretched out myself very much at my ease."

My earliest ecclesiastical recollections are associated with the family pew in the centre of a church: purchased, I believe, for a considerable sum some years before; and, therefore, quite as exclusive as the family drawing-room. At each corner adjoining other pews rose a rod of iron several feet high, with four branches ending in small knobs: the whole resembling a plain gas standard. These were designed for gentlemen's hats: and certainly kept them uninjured: but the sight of so many beavers, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," dangling in mid-air was anything but devotional.

At Christmas we had further adornment. The decoration known as "twigging" caused sundry sprays of holly and mistletoe to be stuck at the top of the pew: and as my father followed the usual custom of standing with one knee bent on the seat during the prayers, and resting his book on the ledge, the prickly evergreen begot many a mild anathema. Other relatives had a square seat over the family vault, before the sanitary craze set in: and the remembrance that a few inches only separated us from the dust that once was love gave additional interest and solemnity to the spot.

The cosy squire's pew of the eighteenth century was an elaborate structure, luxuriously furnished, and surmounted by crimson curtains.

It often contained the only fire-place in the church, and was never complete without a square table. During the reign of George the First, a coloured footman would enter with a tray of light refreshment just before the sermon. In one of these retreats, Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, being ensconced, was roused from a doze by the exhortation—"Let us pray."

"By all means," shouted the Duke; "I have no objection."

The poor were accommodated in narrow pews, very high and stiff in the back. No wonder a timid child remarked that a man in velvet breeches had sat her on a pantry shelf and shut the door. Not so little Johnny, who, "on the promise to be dood," was taken to church. He kept very still till the last prayer, by which time he had grown so tired that he got up on the cushion of the seat, and stood with his back to the pulpit. When the lady in the seat behind bowed her head for prayer, Johnny thought she was crying, so he leaned over and said in a too audible whisper, "Poor, dear lady, what ee matter? Does oo tummy ache?"

Very formidable must have been the pew with a lattice round it in which that red-haired vixen, Queen Bess, sate to criticise the court preachers. They had to be as particular in their allusions as the chaplains of Louis XIV. "We must all die," exclaimed the preacher. The king frowned fiercely. "All, I mean, save your majesty," added the subtle courtier.

When a bishop or other cleric made mention of anything which did not please the vain old woman, the lattice was rattled with terrible energy and distinctness, to the discomfiture of the unfortunate ecclesiastic. Sometimes she spoke outright, as when the Bishop of St. David's ventured upon statistics which the Queen could not follow: "You keep your arithmetic to yourself: the greatest clerks are seldom the wisest men."

How different was the appreciation of a sermon delivered by my eloquent incumbent in Bosley Church, Cheshire. At the conclusion, the kind vicar, leaping through the paper hoop of rubrical restrictions, exclaimed, "My good people, before we sing the hymn I think we cannot do better than heartily thank Mr. Hughes for his most excellent sermon."

In that same church a local landowner, the Earl of Harrington, placed a stained-glass window containing figures of the Virgin and St. John. Some friends of mine, being shown over the building, asked the venerable clerk the subject. "Thein tur," said he, "are meant for Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, but I can't say as they are muich loike."

This equals the result of a friend's efforts when inscribing, in old English letters, "Reverence my sanctuary." The inscription was prominently placed on the ledge of the East window in B—— Church, and puzzled the admiring rustics. At length they came to the conclusion that it was meant for "Reverend Mr. Sculthorpe," the name

of my predecessor. Speaking of sermons, one cannot help noticing how they "hide their diminished heads" until there is little but the tail of their old verbosity left. When ponderous Samuel Parr had concluded the 'Spital Sermon before George the Third, the latter remarked, "I heard something, doctor, in your sermon to-day that I never heard before."

"May I respectfully ask what that was, your Majesty?" lisped the gratified divine, who was expecting a bishopric.

"Well, doctor, I will tell you: I heard the clock strike twice."

Very doubtful was another compliment paid to the late Doctor Armstrong, of Burslem. During the sudden illness of a neighbouring rector, he had come to the rescue. The congregation was scanty; but the eloquence of the doctor excited the enthusiasm of the parish churchwarden.

"I am downright sorry, sir, to see you fishiating in this 'ere poor little place; a much worser gentleman would ha done if we could only have found him."

The description of the Rector of Troston, given by Mrs. Carlyle, is anything but flattering.

"The service went off quite respectably: it is wonderful how little faculty is needed for saying prayers perfectly well. But when we came to the sermon! greater nonsense I have often enough listened to—for, in fact, the sermon (Mrs. Buller with her usual sincerity informed me before I went) was none of his: he had scraped together as many written by other people as would serve him for years; which was better for the congregation." Mrs. Carlyle had merely attended the service to see "how the cratur gets through with it."

What different feelings influenced that excellent lady, the wife of the Rev. E. H. Bray, B.D., Vicar of Tavistock. The whole congregation knew when her dear husband delivered one of his own sermons, which he previously went over at home "word for word, and the gradations of emphasis to be used were indicated by underscoring with one, two or more lines." On such occasions, Mrs. Bray, drawing aside the curtains of the parsonage pew, untied her bonnet, threw back the strings, and standing on a hassock listened with rapt attention to every word of him who was to her the embodiment of Bishop's melody :—

"Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear."

Most careful was Mrs. Bray of her husband's creature comforts. She always read family prayers each morning; and she would pause in the midst "in order to give the cook some caution or direction for the proper preparation of Mr. Bray's and, indeed, of her own dishes." This reminds me of the like domestic asides of my father. On wet Sundays he would read the whole of the service for the day and one of Blair's or Hooker's sermons to his children with such comical

interpolations as "To ask those things which are requisite (Is that Joe just gone past the window?) When your fathers tempted me (My dear, have you thought of the seasoning for the ducks?) From all evil and mischief (I wish those confounded dogs would keep quiet)."

"The only use of sermons," says Miss Fenwick, "is to make respectable people uncomfortable."

This is almost on a par with a lady of last century who wrote to a titled friend respecting the homely truths preached by George Whitefield. "Such sentiments may do very well for the lower classes: but to tell you and me, my dear, that we are vile sinners is exceedingly improper, not to say vulgar."

The ancient sermon was provocative of sleep; so we find in old church accounts a person appointed to keep people awake by what is termed *bobbing*. Thus in 1736 the churchwardens of Prestwich, near Manchester, resolved "That 13*s*. a-year be given to George Grimshaw, of Rooden Lane, for ye time being, and a new coat (not exceeding twenty shillings) every other year for his trouble and pains in wakening sleepers in ye church, whipping out dogs, keeping children quiet and orderly, and keeping ye pulpit and church walks clean." There were similar bobbers by bequest at Trysull, Farmcote, Acton and Dunchurch. I knew of one parish where Bumble was armed with a long stick, having a knob at one end, and a fox's brush at the other. Should he espy a luckless labourer or a charity child nodding assent to the "sixthly," down came his knob with a crack like a gunshot; but when gentility was caught napping, its delicate nose was tickled gently by the brush.

"Nothing," says Lamont, "can justify a long sermon. If it be a good one it need not be long; if it be a bad one it ought not to be long."

Heavy and monotonous must have been the sermons of the saints during the Commonwealth; highly suggestive of Longfellow's lines:—

> "A slumbrous sound, a sound that brings
> The feelings of a dream."

Suggestive, too, of the double meanings of the old sexton when an archdeacon was pointing out to churchwardens the dry rot which had seized upon the woodwork of the seats—"Lord, sir! that's nothing to what you'll find in the pulpit."

> "Damp is the meadow's wide expanse
> And damp the garden and the manse;
> Damp is the church, the walls, the books,
> And damp the congregation looks.
> Damp, too, the surplice, sooth to say,
> On solemn confirmation day;
> Yet sometimes thou the horrid thrall mayst fly,
> Thy sermons, friend, *they* may be dry."

We hear of striking originality from the pulpit sometimes. A young Nonconformist was on probation at a little Bethel. His subject was the "Prodigal Son." His auditory, select and severe, were unmoved by his eloquence for half-an-hour. He would now touch them with his finer fancies; he would appeal to their tenderest feelings. "My dear friends! (with a sigh) the fatted calf! Notice! not one of Pharaoh's lean and ill-favoured kine; not one of five yoke of oxen—great ugly beasts; but a sweetly pretty, gentle, amiable fatted calf. No doubt (added the speaker with deepening pathos) it had been the children's dear little pet *for years.*"

My first incumbent, Mr. Hughes, was very absent-minded. A well-known member of the congregation had enlivened dull December by bringing home his bride: and the ladies were on the tiptoe of expectation on the following Sunday to see what she was like. An involuntary smile was caused by the text—"Behold the bridegroom cometh." By no means diffident was the young lady who extracted a promise from her vicar that he would preach an appropriate sermon when she appeared at church on the Sunday following her marriage. The text was somewhat a surprise:—"Yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

Speaking of marriages, how amusing is the following incident. The incumbent of a populous parish in the Midlands who never failed to have publication of numerous banns, looked for the banns book as usual after the second lesson. Feeling assured of finding it he commenced: "I publish the banns of marriage——" An awkward pause, during which he looked beneath the service books, "but could not see my little friend, because he was not there." "I publish the banns," repeated he, still fumbling, "between—between——" "Between the cushion and the seat, sir," shouted the clerk, looking up and pointing to the place where the book had been mislaid.

Doctor Johnson said that only once was he on the horns of a dilemma. He had hold of an infuriated bull by the tail, and was painfully undecided whether to let go or not. Surely there is no more trying circumstance than to be beset by a wasp when reading the service. There is something highly attractive to that nettlesome insect in the folds of a surplice. Perhaps it thinks of the papyrus of its own nest; or the sedative of ordinary reading is a reminder of its big cousin, the humble bee, in a churn; or probably it instinctively knows that the reader is at its mercy. When I see a wasp flying about a church, I feel as certain as when in a train I see a mother with an infant in arms pass and re-pass the carriage window, that I am to be the victim. I fairly have the creeps when I think of those little yellow coated twins, Uz and Buz, his brother, dodging about the reading desk last August, and mocking my misery and impotency.

They came with the Psalms. The lectern was a few feet distant. I hoped to give them the slip when reading the lessons, and I saw with

satisfaction that one of them was taking the dimensions of a bottled-nosed gentleman in the nave. But the other returned, alas, to its first love with an attachment intensified by absence. It settled on the surplice sleeves; it made a phrenological examination of the back of my head with a view to increasing its bumps; it became entangled and therefore cross, among my scanty locks. To be stung suddenly and by chance is a small matter, but for fully ten minutes to be expecting the cruelly sharp venomous sting of a wasp crawling on the temples is, indeed, prolonged agony.

We had reached the Litany. I felt the horrid insect pausing at the tip of the nose. Free for one moment, whilst the choir responded "Good Lord deliver us," with my right hand I dashed my vicious enemy on to the reading desk, and smashed it with the hymn book. What an untold relief!

Whatever may be said to the contrary, the attendance at church in rural districts, especially of the labouring class, is distinctly on the decline. The attitude of one section of society may, perhaps, be inferred from the remark of a stalwart man of Kent in my former parish. "My mates at the public," said he, "cheeks me about going to church; but I tells them I don't see no harm in going to church occasionally."

There are times, however, when no bell is needed to summon the lagging flock; yet if some of our parochial benefactors of gallons of bread, scarlet cloaks, and fractional parts of a pound, could have realised the anxiety and difficulty of clerical trustees in distributing their gifts, I think some honorarium to them would have been the rule and not the exception.

In my first curacy, in my innocence I observed with pleasure the excellent attendance of the poor old men and women at the morning service in preference to the afternoon. I even mentioned the subject to them during my visits. "Why, you see," said one, "I feels more comfortabler like arter breakfast." Whined another old dame, all curtsies and front teeth: "Shure and indade, sorr, Misther Hughes, he gives such swate sarmons, we would never be after staying away." Whilst a third, a diminutive gentleman in small clothes, declared he "Allers meant the fust thing to patternize St. Peter's."

"Gammon!" exclaimed my dear incumbent, who knew human nature to the core. "Wait next Sunday morning after service, and I will show you more substantial reasons."

Accordingly I walked with him up the south aisle, and in a deep recess formed by a window was a beautiful display of the largest of loaves left by a worthy alderman as a weekly dole. There stood the venerable expectants, with their heads bobbing in every direction "whilst washing their hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water."

How sweetly they smiled a welcome: how calmly they retired, conscious of a duty well done, until they had reached a respectful

distance, when the clatter of their wooden clogs was succeeded by the clatter of their metallic tongues, discoursing in language not strictly parliamentary, because "t' old parson" had not given the three loaves that remained to the seven-and-twenty who clamoured for them.

But of all dole days in the year, good St. Thomas bears the palm; and when the anniversary falls on the Sunday I see no reason why testators' express wishes should be set aside, and another day selected for distribution. Far from it. The church is open and warm; the service is not long, and it is quite as well that many of the applicants who never otherwise attend should for once in a way be called upon "to hear sermons." And yet it is a humiliating sight to witness a crowd of our fellow creatures flocking to the house of prayer "while their heart," to use an old phrase, "is in their half-penny."

What a wonderful reviver is a five-shilling piece. At its bright presence darkness, in the shape of human ills, flies away. The elderly lady whose "cuff" is that troublesome that she never *can* sit in church, finds it a prospective panacea which keeps the "cuff" where such cuffs should ever be, at arms' length. The gentleman of three-score whose "rheumatiz" always monopolises one day in seven, is, as he adds, "particularly free and easy" on the twenty-first day of December. The mother of eight who somehow never can leave her little ones, suddenly remembers a resolution made twelve months before, and is determined, come what may, that she will attend church this morning. Oh, good St. Thomas! what virtue may we not ascribe to thy potency; and yet how short-lived. I take thy wand on the morrow, but its charm has gone. The Sunday bonnet is hung up for the year; the "rheumatiz" returns to its resting-place; the woman who is always ailing, and cannot tell what is the matter, finds a local habitation and a name for every ailment; the seat at church is deserted until the shrine of St. Thomas be re-decked with silver: then, ah, then—Redivivus!

Apart from such *doleful* days, my experience of the labouring class has shown that their attendance at the parish church is carefully regulated by the material benefits they can extract from the parson, and may be thus tabulated:—

The gift of an old coat, three months' attendance; ditto pair of black cloth trousers, six weeks'; ditto waistcoat, three weeks'; ditto pair of strong boots, two weeks'; ditto the shirt off one's back, one week.

OVER THE SPLÜGEN.

IT was in the summer of the year 18— that I travelled with my wife over the Splügen Pass on our way to the Italian Lakes. Soon after the birth of our first child she had fallen into delicate health and the doctors urged me to take her away for a year's sojourn on the Continent.

We left England, and by degrees she rallied under the mountain air of Switzerland and began to take more interest in what was going on around her. We lingered for some weeks in the neighbourhood of Lucerne, choosing the higher stations on the lake for the sake of quiet and cooler air; and I was just about to propose a move to the Engadine, or to some place near Zermatt, from which we would, as winter drew near, find our way to the Riviera, when Lucy surprised me by expressing a strong wish to visit Lake Como, urging that the Engadine was cold, and the excursions both there and around Zermatt would be too fatiguing for her.

Hitherto she had allowed me to take her where I pleased, without asking a question or making an objection, and I hailed the fact of her expressing a preference as a great improvement. I was only too glad to gratify any desire of hers, and before many days had gone by, we quitted Lucerne and passing through Zurich took up our quarters at Ragatz.

It was about a week later that we went over early one morning by train to Chur and secured a comfortable carriage to take us by way of the Splügen to Chiavenna. The weather was clear and fine when we started, and I was pleased to see my wife in better spirits than she had been for a long time.

At Thusis we were to stay the night. It is under twenty miles from Chur and we might easily have gone further, but there seemed to me no reason for doing so. We had plenty of time at our disposal.

I was so delighted with the scenery around Thusis I should have been willing to have remained there two or three days, but Lucy preferred to go on, so we adhered to our original plan.

Thusis is situated on a terrace at the entrance of Via Mala. The Schyn road opens there, too, by which, through the valley of the Albula to Tiefen-kasten, one can get to the Engadine, and there are many other walks and excursions. But the principal attraction of the place is the gorge of the Via Mala, and we agreed to walk part of the way through this so as to see it to the greatest advantage; letting our carriage follow us so that if we were tired we could rest at will.

I need not describe the place. Everyone has seen it and marvelled

at its tremendous precipices which seem as if they would close on any traveller who is so presumptuous as to attempt to make a way through them. It is not a cheerful scene; not even when, as was the case the day we were there, the sun is shining with all its brilliancy and the sky is of a deep, clear blue.

Looking up from its depths we seem to be shut out from the world, to be piercing our way through the bowels of the earth. The long tunnel, called the Verlorenes Loch, is more dismal still; it is narrow, long and dark, and every sound re-echoes from its walls. As we turn and gaze at the ruined castle of Realt and the beautiful valley of Domschleg, lying bright in the sunshine, it is like taking a farewell of life. This is a charming picture with its frame of black rocks and its fringe of dark pine trees, but the tunnel is damp and we dare not linger long. We pass out and look over the precipice at the young Rhine—the only living thing, it seems, as it hurries on eager to be free, anxious to play its part in the world, and to bear its burden as a noble river should.

At the second bridge, one of the most striking objects, we sit on the broad parapet to rest. We can scarcely see the river now, and the cliffs almost meet overhead. It is strange, indeed, that anyone should have thought of making a road through such a cleft as this; and we speculate, as we look around us, on how it came to be done, and talk of the scenes that have taken place along the pass, and wonder at the daring and courage of the men of old.

"Who," questions Lucy, "would think of bringing an army through here in these times?" and we proceed to discuss the changes that have taken place in modern artillery, and other subjects of which we are equally ignorant.

This parapet, with its broad stone facing, is a great comfort to Lucy, who is apt to turn giddy on an unprotected precipice. Now she sits tranquil and enjoys a scene which to her is new and strange. Our driver, Anton, is an intelligent young fellow, and very attentive; he is much discomforted that it is only possible for him to communicate with Lucy through me, as Lucy does not understand German. He is, I see plainly, much struck with Lucy's beauty, and as he cannot address her, tries to make up for it by plucking flowers and offering them to her whenever we stop. Lucy accepts these expressions of good-will with great good-nature, and smiles her thanks, supremely unconscious of the havoc a glance from her blue eyes makes on the poor man's susceptible heart.

We did not hurry ourselves, for we had arranged to stay the night at the village of Splügen. I did not expect to find good accommodation there: one rarely does in the smaller inns on the mountain passes; but in view of the advantage of affording proper rest to the invalid, we were prepared to accept a few disagreeables. Later on I certainly regretted that I had not pushed on that night to Chiavenna—but I must not anticipate. What befell us the next morning might

have happened at any time, and I quite believe I acted for the best.

Splügen is a lonely place; there is nothing attractive about the village itself, and the great mountains around are more gloomy than beautiful. There were very few visitors at the inn, and they were neither friendly nor sociable. The landlady, however, was good-natured and kind. Seeing Lucy's delicate looks she bustled about, hastened to kindle a large fire in our bedroom, and recommended us to take our supper there. She tried her best to make us comfortable, but her resources were small.

We passed a very indifferent night. Poor Lucy was tired and only slept at intervals. I fear the sheets were damp, and this was scarcely to be avoided, for at nightfall everything became shrouded in a thick white mist which penetrated the house and chilled us through and through. We were thankful when morning dawned. A brisk wind sprang up then, which cleared away the fog and allowed the rays of the sun to warm the air. Before ten o'clock it was difficult to believe we had so lately been half frozen, the sun was scorching hot and gave every promise of a brilliant day.

It was about eleven when we set forth once more on our upward way. The summit of the pass, some 2,000 feet higher than the village of Splügen, is reached in about two hours. It is a dreary-looking place, with snow lying in heaps and no vegetation of any kind. Half-an-hour more brought us to the boundary line, where there is a Custom House. Here they detained us for a few minutes but gave us no trouble. They asked sundry questions, refused most graciously our proffered keys, and bowing politely, allowed us to pass on.

The view a little further down is very grand; one of the finest, as I think, on the pass; we look over the great glacier of Curciusa to the peaks beyond, which seem of immense height. I am enchanted with its beauty, but as the descent gets steeper Lucy turns pale and complains of feeling giddy. She asks me if it is safe. I answer boldly, Yes. People travel daily along this road; there is nothing to fear.

To please her I appeal to our driver; he echoes my words, and adds that we are as safe as if we were in our beds; he has been on this road for ten years and has never met with an accident. So far so good.

We drive on. I try to make Lucy talk, but without success. I even bring up the subject of Georgie—a thing I do very seldom. It is a serious thing to begin to discuss Georgie; it may make the mother happy, it may make her sad, and anyhow it lasts a very long time. Now, however, she actually says: "Dear child. Yes, I know; but I cannot talk now," and she lies back with her eyes closed. Seeing which I leave her in peace.

Why does Anton turn his head so frequently? Why does he drive so fast? I am not nervous, as Lucy is; still it appears to me we are

going along at an unusually rapid rate. I do not say so, of course; it will not do to alarm my wife; but at last I bend forward and ask him in a low voice the reason of this. He points backward with his whip but makes no other answer.

I cannot make him out; yesterday he was so chatty and bright, only anxious to please; why is he to-day so silent and stern?

I put the question a second time, but he only clenches his teeth, gives the horse nearest to him a cut with the whip, and we rush on more furiously than ever. Lucy does not notice this; I think she has fallen asleep. I disengage my hand gently from hers, rise from my seat, and turning, look behind me. I see in the distance a heavily-laden waggon making its way down the hill as quickly, so it appears to me, as we do. This relieves me: it must be, I imagine, the custom to descend the pass at this pace; the drivers doubtless know what they are about; it is absurd to be uneasy.

Some feeling, however, prevents my sitting down again (luckily Lucy sleeps on and does not remark my unusual position), and I continue to stand and gaze at the vehicle behind us. It has a sort of fascination for me, I cannot turn my eyes from it. "Surely," I murmur, "it cannot be coming down even faster than we are."

I try to shake off the horrible idea and to assure myself the drivers understand their horses and have them under proper control.

Some few moments go by. I still keep my watch, now kneeling on the seat, for my legs give way under me. A thrill runs through me.

Once more Anton turns his head, and a low, muttered curse escapes him. His face is blanched, his eyes are round with terror. Great Heavens! I see it all now. The men on the cart have no control over their horses; the weight they carry is too great for the slope of the road, the impetus is too strong—they cannot stop if they would.

What is to become of us? I try to remember that there is room for two vehicles on the road; and that the waggon might go past us in safety, if guided by a firm hand—but at the same moment I feel that can never be. No hand can guide that terrible car now advancing to destroy us—no hand but One.

A wild idea crosses my mind that we might stop our carriage, get out, climb up the bank and so save ourselves.

I say a wild idea, because it is one impossible to be carried out, though I still think that when Anton first recognised our danger that would have been the wisest thing to do. Then for a few yards the bank sloped away from the road, and there might have been space for us on the rocks. Now this is not practicable. The cliff is perfectly straight, and besides, God help us, the waggon would be down upon us long before we could get out of the way. Our sole chance is "to fly as if the wolves of Apennine were all upon our track," and this we are doing. Faster and faster Anton urges on his horses till the poor animals are covered with foam and sweat, and their

breathing is loud and painful. I meet Anton's glance, and we look despairingly and in silence into each other's eyes.

It is a flight for dear life and we know it.

I turn to look at Lucy. She slumbers peacefully, though our carriage rocks from side to side, and threatens to overset us as we clear the sharp curve of the zigzag. Were I to wake her now and tell her of our danger, it would kill her, in her weak state. And then how can I wake her and tell her I am powerless to save her from an awful death? No, let her sleep, poor child, if she can. I have no heart to rouse her—to rouse her from a pleasant dream of her infant boy—to the conviction that she will never see his rosy face again in this world.

What a change to come upon us in a few short hours. Only this morning we were speaking of how, as the years went on, we would train our boy, and strive to set him a good example; we had prayed to God to spare him to us and let him be a blessing to our old age. Poor Georgie; you will never know the parents who loved you so tenderly.

Nearer and nearer comes the dreadful waggon, louder and louder sounds the crashing of its wheels, and faster and faster we fly onward. A loud cry from Anton rouses Lucy; she looks up in terror. Alas! she reads no comfort in my face; she sees no reassuring smile. I try to speak, but my lips are dry and no words will come. I can only give a deep groan, and, sinking into my seat, cover my face with my hands.

We rush with such a whirl round the next zigzag that Lucy screams and clings to me in agony. We hear a great crash. Our pace slackens. I feel our time is come. My heart is beating so wildly that I cannot look up. Then we stop, and when, with an effort, I raise my head, Lucy is lying in a dead faint at my feet, Anton has left his seat and is crouched on the road-side crying like a child, our horses are panting and breathless—but we are saved.

At the last corner the great waggon, with its heavy load and its four horses, has gone headlong over the precipice.

It was a good while before either of us could do anything to help the other. Poor Anton had stuck to his post and done his duty bravely while there was need, but now the sudden relief from a prospect of certain death rendered him helpless, and he trembled like a leaf. I was not much better, and when poor Lucy struggled from her faint and asked for water, we were both unable to get it for her.

Before long a carriage, with a large party of English tourists coming up from Chiavenna, stopped and rendered us what assistance they could. They were much impressed by the danger they themselves had incurred, and deeply grateful to have been spared the knowledge of it.

Under the care of the ladies, Lucy revived slowly, though she

was sadly agitated, and, leaving her with them, I went with the gentlemen to search for the unfortunate carmen. We found one of them lying badly wounded just at the turn of the road; he had thrown himself out of the waggon just in time to save his life. The other man went down with his horses. I heard afterwards his body was found hundreds of feet below, his hands clutching at the reins—faithful to his duty to the last.

A stiff glass of brandy restored Anton's nerves, and he soon declared himself able to proceed. The English party volunteered to remain with the wounded man till we sent back help from the next station, and we departed, driving slowly.

At the next village we were soon surrounded by a crowd of people wishful to hear the details of the accident and eager to be of service. I should have been glad if it had been possible to remain there, for we were all in need of rest and quiet; but it seemed a poor place, and I saw it would be difficult to procure the comforts my wife required; so we held on our course for Chiavenna.

There we remained for some days. I was thankful to find that Lucy was less affected by the shock than might have been expected; her sleep had mercifully spared her much anxiety, or I tremble to think what the effect might have been on her weakened frame. As it was I believe I suffered more than she did, and it was well I had time and opportunity for rest, or our positions as invalid and nurse might have been reversed. A strong constitution enabled me soon to throw off the depression caused by the event of that terrible day; but I think, when our time came for returning home, I was no less thankful than my wife that to reach England it was not necessary to travel over the Splügen.

C. N. C.

A GUIDE FROM DREAMLAND.

By J. P. May.

A LARGE city, with thousands and thousands of houses showing dark and grimy against the red and gold of an autumn sunset; large factory chimneys towering from the midst of other buildings and belching forth clouds of black smoke to mar the pure evening atmosphere; and further down, a river, with dark and muddy waters, flowing past the busy manufacturing town, and hurrying to purify itself among the sweet meadows which lay in the dim distance.

On one of the bridges which crossed the broad stream, and which was situated in the very midst of the town, stood a little girl. She was bending down over the parapet, and was gazing dreamily at the dark waters below.

Evidently the child was used to this point of observation, for the continual hurry-scurry of the passers-by did not in the least disturb her meditations. Sad meditations they seemed to be, for now and then a sigh parted the little one's lips and tears glistened on her long, dark lashes.

Poor Daisy! Poor little motherless girl! No one heeded the ragged child with the long golden curls and the dark blue eyes; no one spoke to her, no one had a smile for her, and she thought of the time when she had had a mother, who had been proud of her, and who, if she could not give her handsome clothes like those of the merry children she saw with their nurses, had at least always striven to keep her clean and neat and done what she could to teach and train her aright. And as Daisy was a sensitive child and not over strong, she underwent no end of sacrifices to keep her from rough companions and other kinds of deadening influences. And often at eventide, by the firelight, she would sit and tell her stories of olden time: of elfs and fairies, and the good genii of the forest and the glade, as well as recollections of her own past life—her early girlhood; and would sing many a song for the child's sake, when her own heart was far from being untroubled about the present and the future.

Her mother! It seemed so long to her since she had seen her lying there so calm and peaceful and heard someone say: "She is dead!" Such a long, long time! And yet it was only in May, and it is September now.

Of her father, Daisy remembered but little, for she was only ten, and he had been dead for over six years. He was an honest bricklayer, and they were so happy, he and his wife, with their little girl! But one day he was brought home dying. His skull had been fractured by a fall from a ladder; and that same day Alice White was a widow.

Since then she had striven to earn a sufficient living for her little one and herself as a seamstress, but alas! it was weary, weary work, and the continual bending and stitching had brought on that terrible foe, consumption. And one beautiful day in May, when the birds were singing blithely and the woods were green, Daisy missed her mother's kiss for the first time, and learned to know the meaning of the word orphan. Since then she had been living at her uncle's, but it was a very different life from that she had been accustomed to.

Her uncle lived in two rooms in the fourth storey of a dirty, rickety house in one of the most miserable alleys of the city. He had been a bricklayer, like her father, but had lost his place through his love of drink, and now he earned a little by odd jobs, but passed most of his time in the gin-shop, while his wife, a slatternly virago, bullied the poor little one till she was wearied of life.

John Gray himself was not really a *bad* man had he not been such a drunkard. In a moment of soberness (a rare occurrence!) he had promised his sister on her death-bed to take care of Daisy; for he was her only relation. So Daisy went with him to her new home. She soon found, however, that her life here was to be no sinecure; for Mrs. Gray had no idea of keeping a child who could not earn her own living. And John Gray, who always conceded to his wife (he was a little afraid of her sharp tongue), thought, too, that Daisy ought to do something. So she was sent out in the mornings with a tray with boxes of matches, packets of pins, and other small articles which she was to try to sell in the streets. But oh! it was dreary work and a slow business!

Then in the afternoon she had to sweep up, and nurse the children, a baby of six months and one of eighteen months, till her arms used to ache. And she did not dare to complain for fear of a sharply administered slap from Mrs. Gray's grimy fingers.

The only part of the day in which Daisy was a little less miserable was in the evening, when the children were asleep and she could slip from the house and wander down to the bridge. And there she would crouch down in some corner and watch, through the bars of the parapet, the barges and the steamers on the river. There she could be still and think; think of the old times with her darling mother.

On this evening Daisy was more wearied even than her wont. The children had been restless and Aunt Gray had been more ill-tempered than usual, and besides, business had been bad in the morning, and she had dragged about her wares in vain for many a long mile.

Sitting down in her favourite corner, she wept softly. It did her a lot of good to cry; so she did cry, till her tears seemed quite exhausted. Then she leant back and closed her eyes. Suddenly she heard a low, soft voice say: "Daisy, Daisy!" and looking up she saw the strangest old man she had ever seen in her life. He was very, very small, and was dressed in a queer old suit of black

clothes, with a swallow-tailed coat, the ends of which touched his heels. On his head was an immense and entirely straight chimney-pot hat.

But however ridiculous his attire might have been, Daisy thought she had never seen such a beautiful face before—except her mother's. It would have been difficult to say in what the beauty consisted. Perhaps in the kind blue eyes which shone from underneath the thick white eyebrows; or perhaps in the silky white hair which hung down on his shoulders; or the long white beard which covered his breast; or perhaps again it could be attributed to his rosy skin, which bore hardly a wrinkle in spite of his white hair and apparent old age.

Daisy gazed in a bewildered manner at this strange personage, and at this he began to laugh softly, a laugh like the sound of a silver bell.

"Daisy," he began, when his mirth had subsided, "why were you crying just now?"

"I was thinking of my mother, sir."

"Ah, yes, she was a good woman; a good woman! You are not happy at your uncle's?"

"No," answered Daisy truthfully, inwardly wondering how this little man knew so much about her, and especially how he had known her mother, and that she had never seen him.

"Would you like to live with a good woman like your mother, in a handsome house?"

"Ah, yes! but that will never be!"

"Come with me, Daisy," said the little man imperiously, and the child rose obediently.

Straight past the bridge he led her, down a broad handsome street, and then to the left, and then to the right, in and out, till Daisy was dazed and bewildered.

At last they came into a broader and handsomer street than any they had been through before. Beautiful houses, with large bay windows, stood in solemn majesty there, and through the drawn blinds one could catch glimpses of splendid chandeliers and magnificent candelabras. Out of some of the houses issued the sounds of music; soft, dreamy waltzes and merry polkas; and many a happy laugh floated out into the evening air. Grand carriages stood before some of the doors, and out of them stepped ladies in sweeping satins or soft velvet, their trailing skirts making a gentle rustle as they ascended the broad steps to the houses.

All this Daisy saw as she passed, and would like to have stood and watched all the magnificence longer. But the little man only chuckled as he noted her longing, and said:

"There's better still; there's better still!"

And so on they went, this strange pair, hand-in-hand, till they reached the end of the road. Before the corner house the mysterious friend stopped. It was a large handsome building. No music floated from its windows, but the blinds were not yet drawn,

and one could see the cosy gaslight shining through red globes; one could distinguish, too, the heavy red curtains which hung in sombre draperies on either side. Handsome pictures in broad, gilt frames hung on the walls, and large marble busts ornamented the many costly brackets. Somehow Daisy thought this the nicest house of all.

Suddenly the sound of carriage-wheels roused her from her contemplation, and she saw a handsome brougham, drawn by two prancing greys, dash up to the house and stop in front of it.

A footman sprang down and, opening the door, helped a lady to get out. The lamplight shone on her face, and Daisy could see how pretty and good and kind she looked. She wore no gay ball-dress, but long, sombre, artistic folds of velvet fell round her majestic figure and made it look more queenly still.

Suddenly Daisy felt her companion seize her by the arm and draw her towards the lady. At the sound of footsteps the latter turned and saw the little girl. For a moment she stood still and looked at her; then she cried:

"Oh! what a darling child! What eyes! Just the thing I wanted! Come with me!"

And before she had time to think, she was within the gate, the lady holding her hand. She looked behind to see if her old friend was following, when she regretfully saw him getting dimmer and dimmer, till he faded at last into air and disappeared. And while she stood spell-bound, wondering at this strange sight, the lady's hold on her fingers relaxed, she seemed to feel herself sinking, sinking, sinking! She gave a cry and shut her eyes.

When she opened them again she was sitting in her old corner on the bridge, alone and friendless! The sunset glow had disappeared from the sky; the night had fallen; thousands of lights shone in the great city, and only in the child's heart was darkness. Oh, why had Heaven sent her that happy dream, to make her home seem all the more miserable when she should have to go to it? She looked around, half-expecting to see that strange old friend, but she saw only indifferent faces passing on till they were lost to view. Only a dream! A beautiful, enchanting, deceitful dream! Poor Daisy! poor little forsaken flower!

"I must go home," she said half aloud to herself. And the thought of *that* home was like gall to her, since she had seen, if only in imagination, what some homes were like. Ah! how unjust, she thought, that some people should be so rich and happy, while others had only misery and poverty all around them! Daisy, Daisy! you have still to learn that not riches alone give contentment, and that many a brocaded bodice hides an aching heart!

Turning round, she looked down the bridge. Straight in front of her lay the very road through which she had passed first in her dream! She must have often seen it before, but it had never struck

her until now. Moved by some irresistible impulse, she hastened towards it and hurried past the gaily-lighted shops without giving them a look. Her little head was strangely excited, and she could not have said what feeling impelled her onward.

First to the left, then to the right, on she walked, recognising the streets as she went along. To the right again and then to the left, the little one hurried on, till she stood before a large and handsome road. She knew it well, and her heart gave a great throb. She did not know what to think ; she only knew one thing, and that was to her as clear as daylight : this was the road where her dream had ended, and—yonder in the distance—the corner house ! Yes, there the beautiful lady had stepped from her carriage, there she had taken her by the hand, and there the dream had ended so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

As she ran, she heard the waltzes, the polkas and the gay laughter wafted on the air from the houses. But she took no notice of them this time, but ran on, the evening breeze tossing about her golden curls as she went.

Yes, there it was ! The same happy, bright-looking house, the blinds still up, the rosy light giving a cheerful air to the surroundings and casting a shimmer of pink on the large busts on the brackets. The curtains seemed to hang in the very same folds as when she had seen them in fancy.

Suddenly she saw a servant, in a neat black dress and spotless apron, enter the room ; and then the blind was slowly drawn down and the pictures and busts and the red light disappeared from her view.

Still she stood there, regretfully gazing at the dark window, and as she gazed, she heard behind her the sound of carriage-wheels. Up dashed a beautifully appointed landau and stopped before the house. Two splendid greys stood pawing the ground and tossing their handsome heads ; the footman in quiet livery alighted and opened the door, and Daisy's bewildered eyes beheld the lady in the black velvet robe stepping majestically out of the carriage. But she was not alone. Behind her alighted another lady, smaller and of a slighter build ; still, from a certain likeness in the features, it was easy to guess that they were sisters.

Daisy's heart beat fast as the two ladies passed her. If they would only notice her ! If she could only get one smile from those kind, sweet faces ! As the thought crossed her mind, she sighed aloud ; the smaller lady turned and saw her. A flash of admiration passed through her eyes, and she seized her companion by the arm :

" Look, Eva, what a sweet face ! Such an one as you want for your group ! Quite a poor child, too."

The other lady stopped and looked at Daisy : a kind, gentle look.

" Yes, Mildred, you are right ; she would do well. But she may have parents who would not be willing to let her come and sit for me. What is your name, little one ? "

"Daisy White, ma'am."

"Daisy! a fitting name for a little flower; is it not, Mildred? Where do you live, Daisy?"

Daisy named the street. The lady looked compassionate, and her companion exclaimed:

"Oh, Eva! Poor child! it is such a horrid place!"

"Have you a father and mother, child?"

"Oh, no!" and the little one's eyes filled with tears. "They are both in heaven, ma'am."

The two ladies looked at each other in surprise; the child spoke in very refined language for one of the inhabitants of such a street as that she had named. They were touched, too, at the sorrow in her eyes.

"Whom do you live with, then?"

"With my uncle and aunt; but they do not care about me, ma'am. I sell matches and pins and things like that in the streets, but there are not many people that buy."

"Would you like to come into my house, Daisy, and sit still so that I could paint you in a picture?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" was the eager reply, and Daisy's eyes sparkled at the idea of entering that lovely house.

"Then you must come here to-morrow at eleven o'clock—or stay, I will come for you and speak to your aunt."

"Take her in now, Eva, and give her something to eat; she looks half starved."

"So she does, Mildred, and you are right, as you always are. Come, Daisy." And she took the little one by the hand and led her up the broad steps, through a large corridor, into that cosy room with the red light.

"Sit down, Daisy, and wait a moment until we come back," said the elder lady, and Daisy sat down as in a dream, and hoped that if it was a dream she might never awaken.

After awhile, the ladies came back; they had taken off their hats and cloaks and looked so good and kind.

They evidently seemed to have given some orders already, for as soon as the elder one rang the bell, a footman appeared bearing a tray on which were spread a few nice substantial things.

"Now, Daisy," said the younger lady, spreading out the things on the table, "come and sit down here and have a nice supper; and after that, you must tell us all about yourself."

So Daisy ate her supper thankfully, and after she had finished she looked up with these great blue eyes of hers and said: "How good you are to me! better even than in my dream."

"Your dream, Daisy! Why, what was that?"

So Daisy told her whole story, and the two listened attentively till she had finished.

"Well, Providence seems to have meant you to have come to us,

Daisy," said Mrs. Crawford, for that was the lady-artist's name. "So you shall stay here for to-night. It is too late to go home now, and we will find a nice little bed for you somewhere. To-morrow we will see what is to be done. Eh, Mildred?"

"Yes, dear, that is right," said Miss Stokes, the younger lady; "the lassie is sure to be tired."

And so, to Daisy's wonder and delight, she was consigned to the care of Mrs. Martin, the housekeeper, and soon found herself lying in a cosy bed with soft, downy pillows, and her last recollection was of Mrs. Crawford's sweet face bending over her, bidding her good-night. And her dreams were rose-coloured.

"Mildred."

"Well, Eva?"

Mrs. Crawford was sitting in an arm-chair and her sister was facing her. They had been talking about the little girl they had just put to bed, and Mrs. Crawford's face bore a thoughtful expression, as if an idea had just struck her.

"Well, Eva?"

"I have been thinking, Mildred, of what a lonely life you and I lead. Since my husband died, you know, I have often spoken of adopting some pretty, gentle little girl. Well, Daisy is pretty and gentle, isn't she?"

"Yes," replied Miss Stokes, smiling. "I guessed what was in your head, Eva, ever since I noticed that thoughtful look in your eyes."

"Do you approve the idea, then?"

"Why, yes, with all my heart, if the uncle consents. I am rarely deceived in my first judgment of a character, and I believe Daisy to be a really good, lovable child."

"And it seems as if Providence sent her to us; don't you think so?"

"Yes, it is strange. But strange things do happen, and one is tempted to believe in dreams sometimes."

"Well, we must speak to her relations; and if they are willing, and her own heart says Yes, why she shall stay and be our little girl."

So the next day the Grays, who had not known what to think of Daisy's absence, were rather astonished when they saw two such grand ladies enter, holding Daisy by the hand.

Mrs. Crawford briefly related the events of the preceding evening, and explained the object of her visit.

John Gray, who was quite sober for once, and thought of his promise to his dying sister, hummed and hawed a good deal at first; and Mrs. Gray vehemently opposed the scheme, saying the child was useful to them; but at last Mrs. Crawford succeeded in convincing them that it would be for the best; and so they finally consented, and signed a paper which Mrs. Crawford had had ready for use.

After the ladies and Daisy had left, Gray and his wife were

agreeably surprised to find on the table a twenty-pound note, which Mrs. Crawford had laid there, and beside it, on a slip of paper, were the words: "To make up for the loss of Daisy."

It is ten years later. The month of May is drawing to a close, and the Art Exhibition has just been opened. In the principal room of the building hangs a picture which attracts all eyes by its bold, artistic colouring, and by its expression and depth of feeling. As the catalogue can tell, it is called "Homeless," and represents a bridge in a great city at sunset. A little girl, with golden curls and faded clothes, is leaning over the parapet, gazing wistfully and with tearful eyes into the ripples beneath. The indifference of the passers-by is well portrayed, and the whole picture is powerful and suggestive.

Two artists stop before it.

"Fine picture, that—288."

"Very; especially when one considers the age of the artist."

"How so?"

"Why, don't you know? Margaret Wray is the name assumed by a young girl of about twenty, a young protégée of the well-known Mrs. Crawford."

"Indeed! Well, her picture is most admirable."

"Yes; it does her great credit, and predicts a brilliant future. The sunset is grand."

And they move on. But three ladies behind them have heard what they said. Two of them appear sisters, and must be both between forty and fifty; but the third cannot be more than twenty, and is strikingly beautiful and refined.

"Did you hear what they said, Daisy?" asks the elder lady. "It was very complimentary to you. They are no ordinary critics, for they are two of the ablest artists of the day. I am proud of you, child!"

Daisy's eyes shine with happy pride as she answers softly: "Ah, Aunt Eva, I owe it all to you and Aunt Mildred. I shall never, never be able to repay such a debt!"

"No, Daisy," answered Mrs. Crawford, with a smiling face, though there is a very tender expression in her eyes: "not to us do you owe it all, but to a certain little 'Guide from Dreamland.'"

A BEATITUDE.

"Blessed are they that mourn."

O SWEETEST words of Holy Writ,
And dearest Son of God that spake!
Our grief, since Thou hast looked on it,
Is blessed for Thy sake.

We cannot help the lot that falls,
Obedient to the perfect mind;
We parley with the voice that calls,
But Thou, Lord, Thou art kind!

'Twere better this or that, we say—
To live long summers out and grow
To ripeness, with a riper day,
Nor fade before the snow:

Forgetful that Thy summers range
Through other spheres and larger space,
Nor ever lapse, nor suffer change,
Made perfect by Thy face.

Though few be all our years below,
We have a glorious hope in this—
The steps we came, the steps we go,
Link two eternities.

How, then, if one among us pass
Beyond the outer veil, and win
The crown and robe of righteousness,
And meet the King within;

Shall we not count his glory gain,
And daily in our closet pray
That, living not our lives in vain,
We may go up that way?

Poor heart of man, so brave, so weak!
Poor stricken hearts that can but feel!
Come, take ye blessing all who seek,
This love is strong to heal:

No other voice is half so sweet—
"Blessed are they that mourn," He said;
Lay all your sorrows at His feet,
Stay, and "be comforted."

GEORGE COTTERELL.

J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXI.

WITH MR. JONES.

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—I particularly wish you to come to me. I want some legal advice, and I would rather you acted for me than anyone else. Come up this morning, please.

"Your affectionate sister,

"BLANCHE."

The above note, brought from Gloucester Place on Monday morning by one of Lady Level's servants, reached me before ten o'clock. By the dashing character of the handwriting, I judged that Blanche had not been in the calmest temper when she penned it.

"Is Lord Level at home?" I inquired of the man, Sanders.

"No, sir. His lordship went down to Marshdale yesterday evening. A telegram came for him, and I think it was in consequence of that he went."

I wrote a few words to Blanche, telling her I would be with her as soon as I could, and sent it by Sanders.

But a lawyer's time is not always his own. One client after another kept coming in that morning, as if on purpose; and it was half-past twelve in the day when I reached Gloucester Place.

The house in Gloucester Place was, and had been for some little time now, entirely rented by Lord Level of Major Carlen. The Major, when in London, had rooms in Seymour Street, but lived chiefly at his club.

"Her ladyship has gone out, sir," was Sanders's greeting to me, when he answered my ring at the door-bell.

"Gone out?"

"Just gone," confirmed Major Carlen, who was there, it seemed, and came forward in the wake of Sanders. "Come in, Charles."

He turned into the dining-room, and I after him. "Blanche

ought to have waited in," I remarked. "I have come up at the greatest inconvenience."

"She has gone off in a tantrum," cried the Major, lowering his voice as he carefully closed the door and pushed a chair towards me, just as if the house were still in his occupancy.

"But where has she gone?" I asked, not taking the chair, but standing with my elbow on the mantelpiece.

"Who's to know? To you, in Essex Street, I shouldn't wonder. She was on the heights of impatience at your not coming."

"Not to Essex Street, I think, Major. I should have seen her."

"Nonsense! There's fifty turnings and windings between this and Essex Street, where you might miss one another; your cab taking the straight way and she the crooked," retorted the Major. "When Blanche gets her back up, you can't easily put it down."

"Something has gone contrary, I expect."

"Nothing has gone contrary but herself," said the Major in reply, who seemed in a cross and contrary mood on his own part. "Women are the very deuce for folly."

"Well, what is it all about, sir? I suppose you can tell me?"

The Major sat down in Lord Level's easy chair, pushed back his cloak, and prepared to explain.

"What it's all about is just nothing, Charles; but so far as Madam Blanche's version goes, it is this," said he. "They were about to sit down, yesterday evening, to dinner—which they take on Sundays at five o'clock (good, pious souls!) and limit their fare to roast beef and a tart—when a telegram arrived from Marshdale. My lord seemed put out about it; my lady was no doubt the same. 'I must go down at once, Blanche,' said he, speaking on the spur of the moment. 'But, why? Where's the need of it?' returned she. 'Surely there can be nothing at Marshdale to call you away on Sunday and in this haste?' 'Yes,' said he, 'there is; there's illness.' And then, Blanche says, he tried to cough down the words, as if he had made a slip of the tongue. 'Who is ill?' said Blanche. 'Let me see the telegram.' Level slid the telegram into his pocket, and told her it was Mr. Edwards, the old steward. Down he sat again at the table, swallowed a mouthful of beef, sent Sanders to put up a few things in his small portmanteau, and was off in a cab like the wind. Fact is," added the Major, "had he failed to catch that particular train, he would not have got down at all, being Sunday; and Sanders says that catching it must have been a near shave for his lordship."

"Is that all?"

"No. This morning there was delivered here a letter for his lordship; post-mark Marshdale, handwriting a certain Italian one that Blanche has seen before. She has seen the writer, too, it seems; a fair lady called Nina. Blanche argues that as the letter came from Marshdale, the lady must be at Marshdale, and she means to know

without delay, she says, who and what this damsel is, and what the tie may be that binds her to Lord Level and gives her the right to pursue him, as she does, and the power to influence his movements, and to be at her beck and call. The probability is," added the shrewd Major, "that this person wrote to him on the Saturday, but, being a foreigner, was not aware that he would not receive her letter on Sunday morning. Finding that he did not arrive at Marshdale on the Sunday, and, the day getting on, she despatched the telegram. That's how I make it out, Charles; I don't know if I am right."

"You think, then, that some Italian lady is at Marshdale?"

"Sure of it," returned the Major. "I've heard of it before to-day. Expect she lives there, making journeys to her own land between whiles, no doubt. The best and the worst of us get home-sick."

"You mean that she lives there in — in — well, in a manner not quite orthodox; and that Lord Level connives at it?"

"Connives at it!" echoed the old reprobate. "Why, he is at the top and bottom of it. Level's a man of the world, always was, and does as the world does. And that little ignorant fool, Blanche, ferrets out some inkling of this, and goes and sets up a fuss! Level's as good a husband to her as can be, and yet she's not content! Commend me to foolish women! They are all alike!"

In his indignation against women in general, Major Carlen rose from his chair and began striding up and down the room. I was pondering on what he had said to me.

"What right have wives to rake up particulars of their husband's private affairs?" he demanded fiercely. "If Level does go off to Marshdale for few days' sojourn now and again, is it any business of Blanche's what he goes for, or what he does there, or who he sees? Suppose he chose to maintain a whole menagerie of — of — Italian monkeys there, ought Blanche to interfere and make bones over it?"

"But ——"

"He does not offend her; he does not allow her to see that anything exists to offend her: why, then, should she suspect this and suspect that, and peep and peer after Level as if she were a detective told off expressly to watch his movements?" continued the angry man. "Only an ignorant girl would dream of doing it. I am sick of her folly."

"Well now, Major Carlen, will you listen to me for a moment," I said, speaking quietly and calmly as an antidote to his heat. "I don't believe this. I think you and Blanche are both mistaken."

He brought himself to an anchor on the hearthrug, and stared at me under his thick, grizzled eyebrows. "What is it that you don't believe, Charles?"

"This that you insinuate about Marshdale. I have faith in Lord Level; I like Lord Level; and I think you are misjudging him."

"Oh, indeed!" responded the Major. "I suppose you know what a wild blade Level always was?"

"In his early days he may have been. But you may depend upon it that when he married he left his wild ways behind him."

"All right, young Charles. And, upon my word, you are pretty near as young in the world's depths as Blanche herself is," was the Major's sarcastic remark. "Do you wish to tell me there's nothing up at Marshdale, with all these mysterious telegrams to Level, and his scampers back in answer? Come!"

"I admit that there seems to be some mystery at Marshdale. Something that we do not understand, and that Lord Level does not intend us to understand: but I must have further proof before I can believe it is of any such nature as you hint at, Major. For a long time past, Lord Level has appeared to me like a man in trouble; as if he had some anxiety on his mind."

"Well," acquiesced the Major equably, "and what can trouble a man's mind more than the exactions of these foreign syrens? Let them be Italian, or Spanish, or French — what you will — they'll worry your life out of you in the long run. What does that Italian girl do at Marshdale?"

"I cannot say. For my own part I do not know that one is there. But if she be, if there be a whole menagerie of Italian ladies there, as you have just expressed it, Major ——"

"I said a menagerie of monkeys," he growled.

"Monkeys, then. But whether they be monkeys or whether they be ladies, I feel convinced that Lord Level is acting no unworthy part—that he is loyal to his wife."

"You had better tell her so," nodded the Major; "perhaps she'll believe you. I told her the opposite. I told her that when women marry gay and attractive men, they must look out for squalls, and learn to shut their eyes a bit in going through life. I bade her bottle up her fancies, and let Marshdale and her husband alone, and not show herself a simpleton before the public."

"What did she say to that?"

"Say? It was that piece of advice which raised the storm. She burst out of the room like a maniac, declaring she wouldn't remain in it to listen to me. The next thing was, I heard the street door bang, and saw my lady go out, putting on her gloves as she went. You came up two minutes afterwards."

I was buried in my thoughts again. He stood staring at me, as if I had no business to have thoughts.

"Look here, Major: one thing strikes me forcibly: the very fact of Lord Level allowing these telegrams to come to him openly is enough to prove that matters are not as you and Blanche suspect. If ——"

"How can a telegram come secretly?" interrupted the Major.

"He would take care that they did not come at all—to his house."

"Oh, would he?" cried the old reprobate. "I should like to know how he could hinder it if any she-fiend chooses to send them."

"Rely upon it he would hinder it. Level is not one to be coerced against his will by either man or woman. Have you any idea how long Blanche will remain out?"

"Just as much as you have, Charley. She may remain away till night, for all I know."

It was of no use, then, my staying longer; and time, that day, was almost as precious to me as gold. Major Carlen threw on his cloak, and we went out together.

"I should not wonder if my young lady has gone to Seymour Street," remarked the Major. "The thought has just occurred to me."

"To your lodgings, you mean?" I asked, thinking it very unlikely.

"Yes; Mrs. Guy is there. The poor old thing arrived from Jersey on Saturday. She has come over on her usual errand—to consult the doctors; grows more ridiculously fanciful as she grows older. You might just look in upon her now, Charles; it's close by: and then you'll see whether Blanche is there or not."

I spared a few minutes for it. Poor Mrs. Guy looked very poorly indeed; but she was meek and mild as ever, and burst into tears as I greeted her. Her ailments I promised to go and hear all about another time. Yes, Blanche was there. When we went in, she was laughing at something Mrs. Guy had said, and her indignation seemed to have subsided.

I could not stay long. Blanche came out with me, thinking I should go back with her to Gloucester Place. But that was impossible; I had already wasted more time than I could well spare. Blanche was vexed.

"My dear, you should not have gone out when you were expecting me. You know how very much I am occupied."

"Papa vexed me, and drove me to it," she answered. "He said—oh, such wicked things, that I could not and would not stay to listen. And all the while I knew it was not that he believed them, but that he wanted to make excuses for Lord Level."

I did not contradict her. Let her retain, an' she could, some little veneration for her step-father.

"Charles, I want to have a long conversation with you, so you must come to me as soon as you can," she said. "I mean to have a separation from my husband; perhaps a divorce, and I want you to tell me how I must proceed in it. I did think of applying to Jennings and Ward, Lord Level's solicitors, but perhaps you will be best."

I laughed. "You don't suppose, do you, Blanche, that Lord Level's solicitors would act for you against him?"

"Now, Charles, you are speaking lightly; you are making game of me. Why do you laugh? I can tell you it is more serious than you may think for; and I am serious. I have talked of this for a long time, and now I *will* act. How shall I begin?"

"Do not begin at all, Blanche," I said, with earnestness. "*Do*

nothing. Were your father living—were your mother living, they would both give you this advice—and this is not the first time I have enjoined it on you. Ah, my dear, you do not know—you little guess what misery to the wife such a climax as this which you propose would involve."

Blanche had turned to the railings round the interior of Portman Square, and halted there, apparently looking at the shrubs. Her eyes were full of tears.

"On the other hand, Charles, you do not know, you cannot guess, what I have to bear; what a misery it makes of my life."

"Are you *sure* of the facts that make the misery?"

"Why, of course I am."

"I think not, Blanche. I think you are mistaken."

She turned to me in surprise. "But I *can't* be mistaken," she said. "How can I be? If Lord Level does not go to Marshdale to—to—to see people, what does he go for?"

"He may go for something quite different. My dear, I have more confidence in your husband than you have, and I think you are wrong. I must be off; I've not another moment; but these are my last words to you, Blanche.—Take no action. Be still. *Do nothing.*"

By half-past four o'clock, the most pressing of my work was over for the day, and then I took a cab to Lincoln's Inn to see Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar. He had often said to me, good old uncle that he was: "Come to me always, Charles, when you are in any legal doubt or difficulty, or deem that my opinion may be of use to you." I was in one of those difficulties now. Some remarkably troublesome business had been laid before me by a client; I could not see my way in it at all, and was taking it to Sergeant Stillingfar.

The old chambers were just as they used to be; as they were on the day which the reader has heard of, when I saw them for the first time. Running up the stairs, there sat a clerk at the desk in the narrow room, where young Lake, full of impudence, had sat that day, Mr. Jones's empty place beside it now, as it was then.

"Is the Sergeant in?" I asked the clerk.

"No, sir; he's not out of Court yet. Mr. Jones is in."

I went on to the inner room. Old Jones, the Sergeant's own especial clerk, was writing at his little desk in the corner. Nothing was changed; not even old Jones himself. He was not, to appearance, a day older, and not an ounce bigger. Lake used to tell him he would make his fortune if he went about the country in a caravan and called himself a consumptive lamp-post.

"My uncle is not back from Court, Graham says," I observed to the clerk, after shaking hands.

"Not yet," he answered. "I don't think he'll be long. Sit down, Mr. Strange."

I took the chair I had taken that first day years ago, and waited.

Mr. Jones finished the writing he was about, arranged his papers, and then came and stood with his back to the fire, having kept his quill in his hand. It must be a very hot day indeed which did not see a fire in that grate.

"If the Sergeant is not back speedily, I think I must open my business to you, and get your opinion, Mr. Jones," I said. "I dare-say you could give me one as well as he."

"Some complicated case that you can't quite manage?" he rejoined.

"It's the most complicated, exasperating case I ever had brought to me," I answered. "I think it is a matter more for a detective officer to deal with than a solicitor. If Sergeant Stillingfar says the same, I shall throw it up."

"Curious things, some of those detective cases," remarked Mr. Jones, gently waving his pen.

"They are. I wouldn't have to deal with them, *as* a detective, for the world. Shall I relate this case to you?"

He took out his watch and looked at it. "Better wait a bit longer, Mr. Charles. I expect the Sergeant every minute now."

"Don't you wonder that my uncle continues to work?" I cried presently. "He is old now. *I* should retire."

"He is sixty-five. If you were not young yourself, you would not call that old."

"Old enough, I should say, for work to be a labour to him."

"A labour that he loves, and that he is as capable of performing as he was twenty years ago," returned old Jones. "No, Mr. Charles, I do not wonder that he should continue to work."

"Did you know that he had been offered a judgeship?"

Old Jones laughed a little. I thought it was as much as to say there was little which concerned the Sergeant that he did not know.

"He has been offered a judgeship more than once—had it pressed upon him, Mr. Charles. The last time was when Mr. Baron Charlton died."

"Why! that is only a month or two ago!"

"Just about nine weeks, I fancy."

"And he declined it?"

"He declines them all."

"But what can be his motive? It would give him more rest than he enjoys now ——"

"I don't altogether know that," interrupted the clerk. "The judges are very much over-worked now. It would increase his responsibility; and he is one to feel that, perhaps painfully."

"You mean when he had to pass the dread sentence of death. A new judge must always feel that at the beginning."

"I heard one of our present judges say—it was in this room, too, Mr. Charles—that the first time he put on the black cap he never

closed his eyes the whole night after it. All the Bench are not so sensitive as that, you know."

A thought suddenly struck me. "Surely," I cried, "you do not mean that *that* is the reason for my uncle's refusing a seat on the Bench!"

"Not at all. He'd get over that in time as others do. Oh, no, that has nothing to do with it."

"Then I really cannot see what can have to do with it. It would give him a degree of rest; yes, it would; and it would give him rank and position."

"But it would take from him half his income. Yes, just about half, I reckon," repeated Mr. Jones, attentively regarding the feather of the pen.

"What of that? He must be putting by heaps and heaps of money—and he has neither wife nor child to put by for."

"Ah!" said the clerk, "that is just how we all are apt to judge of a neighbour's business. Would it surprise you very much, sir, if I told you that the Sergeant is *not* putting by?"

"But he must be putting by. Or what becomes of his money?"

"He spends it, Mr. Charles."

"*Spends it!* Upon what?"

"Upon other people."

Mr. Jones looked at me from across the hearthrug and I looked at him. The assertion puzzled me.

"It's true," he said with a nod. "You have not forgotten that great calamity which happened some ten or twelve years ago, Mr. Charles? That bank which went to pieces, and broke up homes and hearts? *Your* money went in it."

As if I could forget that!

"The Sergeant's money, all he had then saved, went in it," continued the clerk. "Mortifying enough, of course, but he was in the full swing of his prosperity, and could soon have replaced it. What he could not so easily replace, Mr. Charles, was the money he had been the means of placing in the bank belonging to other people, and which was lost. He had done it for the best. He held the bank to be thoroughly sound and prosperous; he could not have had more confidence in his own integrity than he had in that bank; and he had counselled friends and others whom he knew, who were not as well off as he was, to invest all they could spare in it, believing he was doing them a kindness. Instead of that, it ruined them."

I thought I saw what the clerk was coming to. After a pause, he went on.

"It is these people that he has been working for, Mr. Charles. Some of them he has entirely repaid—the money, you know, which he caused them to lose. He considered it his duty to recompense them, so far as he could; and to keep them, where they needed to be kept, until he had effected that. For those who were better off

and did not need present help, he put money by as he could spare it, investing it in the funds in their name: I daresay your name is amongst them. That's what Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar does with his income, and that's why he keeps on working."

I had never suspected this.

"I believe it is almost accomplished now," said the clerk. "So nearly that I thought he might, perhaps, have taken the judgeship on this last occasion. But he did not. 'Just a few months longer in harness, Jones,' he said to me, 'and then ——' So I reckon that we shall yet see him on the Bench, Mr. Charles."

"He must be very good."

"Good!" echoed old Jones, with emotion; "he is made of goodness. There are few people like him. He would help the whole world if he could. I don't believe there's any man who has ever done a single service for him of the most trifling nature but he would wish to place beyond the reach of poverty. 'I've put a trifle by for you, Jones,' he said to me the other day, 'in case you might be at a loss for another such place as this when my time's over.' And when I tried to thank him ——"

Mr. Jones broke down. Bringing the quill pen under his eyes, as if he suddenly caught sight of a flaw thereon, I saw a drop of water fall on to it.

"Yes, Mr. Charles, he said that to me. It has taken a load from my mind. When a man is on the downhill of life and is not sure of his future, he can't help being anxious. The Sergeant has paid me a liberal salary, as you may well guess, but he knows that it has not been in my power to put by a fraction of it. 'You are too generous with your money, Sergeant,' I said to him one day a good while ago. 'Ah, no, Jones, not at all,' he answered. 'God has prospered me so marvellously in these later years, what can I do but strive to prosper others.' Those were his very words."

And with these last words of Jones's our conference came to an end. The door was abruptly thrown open by Graham to admit the Sergeant. Mr. Jones helped him off with his wig and gown and handed him the little flaxen top that he wore when not on duty. Then Jones, leaving the room for a few moments, came back with a glass of milk, which he handed to his master.

"Would not a glass of wine do you more good, uncle?" I asked.

"No, lad; not so much. A glass of milk after a hard day's work in Court refreshes me. I never touch wine except at dinner. I take a little then; not much."

Sitting down together when Mr. Jones had again left us, I opened my business to the Sergeant as concisely as possible. He listened attentively, but made no remark until the end.

"Now go over it all again, Charles."

I did so: and this second time I was repeatedly interrupted by remarks or questions. After that we discussed the case.

"I cannot see any reason why you should not take up the matter," he said, when he had given it a little silent consideration. "I do not look upon it quite as you do; I think you have formed a wrong judgment. It is intricate at present; I grant you that; but if you proceed in the manner I have suggested, you will unravel it."

"Thank you, Uncle Stillingfar. I can never thank you enough for all your kindness to me."

"Were you so full of anxiety over this case?" he asked, as we were shaking hands, and I was about to leave. "You look as though you had a weight of it on your brow."

"And so I have, uncle; but not about this case. Something nearer home."

"What *is* it?" he returned, looking at me.

"It is —— Perhaps I had better not tell it you."

"I understand," he slowly said. "Tom Heriot, I suppose. Why does he not get away?"

"He is too ill for that at present: confined to his room and his bed. Of course he does not run quite so great a risk as he did when he persisted in parading the streets, but danger is always imminent."

"He ought to end the danger by getting away. Very ill, is he?"

"So ill that I think danger will soon be all at an end in another way; it certainly will be unless he rallies."

"What is the matter with him?"

"I cannot help fearing that consumption has set in."

"Poor fellow! Oh, Charles, how that fine young man has spoilt his life! Consumption?—Wait a bit—let me think," broke off the Sergeant. "Why, yes, I remember now; it was consumption that Colonel Heriot's first wife died of—Tom's mother."

"Tom said so the last time I saw him."

"Ah. He knows it then. Better not see him too often, Charles. You are running a risk yourself, as you must be aware."

"Yes; I know I am. It is altogether a trial. Good-day, uncle."

I shook hands with Jones as I passed through his room, and ran down the stairs; feeling all the better for my interview with him and with his patron, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE drawing-room floor at Lennard's made very comfortable quarters for Tom Heriot, and his removal from the room in Southwark had been accomplished without difficulty. Mrs. Lennard, a patient, mild, weak woman, who could never have been strong-minded, made him an excellent nurse, her more practical and very capable daughter, Charlotte, aiding her when necessary.

A safer refuge could not have been found in London. The Lennards were so often under a cloud themselves as regarded pecuniary matters, so beset at times by their unwelcome creditors—the butcher, baker and grocer, that the chain of their front door was kept habitually fastened, and no one was admitted within its portals without being first of all subjected to a comprehensive survey. Had some kind friend made a rush to the perambulating policeman of the district, to inform him that the domicile of those Lennards was again in a state of siege, he would simply have speculated upon whether the enemy was this time the landlord or the Queen's taxes. It chanced to be neither; but it was well for the besieged to favour the impression that it was one or the other, or both. Policemen do not wage war with unfortunate debtors, and Mr. Lennard's house was as safe as a remote castle.

"Mr. Brown" Tom was called there; none of the household, with the exception of its master, having any idea that it was not his true name. "One of the gentlemen clerks in Essex Street, who has no home in London; I have undertaken to receive him while he is ill," Mr. Lennard had carelessly remarked to his wife and daughters before introducing Tom. They had unsuspecting minds, except as regarded their own creditors, those ladies—ladies always, though fallen from their former state—and never thought to question the statement, or to be at all surprised that Mr. Strange himself took an interest in his clerk's illness and paid an evening visit to him now and then. The doctor who was called in, a hard-worked practitioner named Purfleet, did his best for "Mr. Brown," but had no time to spare for curiosity about him in any other way, or to give so much as a thought to his antecedents.

And just at first, after being settled at Lennard's, Tom Heriot seemed to be taking a turn for the better. The warmth of the comfortable rooms, the care given to him, the strengthening diet, and perhaps a feeling that he was in a safer asylum than he had yet found, all had their effect upon him for good.

"Hatch!" called out Mrs. Brightman.

Hatch ran in from the next room. "Yes, ma'am."

"Let Perry go and tell the gardener to cut some of his best grapes, white and purple, and do you arrange them in a basket. I shall go up to Essex Street and see my daughter this afternoon, and will take them to her. Order the carriage for half-past two o'clock."

"Miss Annabel will be finely pleased to see you, ma'am!" remarked Hatch.

"Possibly so. But she is no longer Miss Annabel. Go and see about the grapes."

When Mrs. Brightman's tones were cold and haughty, and they sounded especially so just now, she brooked no dilatoriness in those

who had to obey her behests. Hatch turned away immediately, and went along talking to herself.

"She's getting cross and restless again. I'm certain of it. In a week's time from this we shall have her as bad as before. And for ever so many weeks now she has been as cautious and sober as a judge! Hang the drink, then! Doctors may well call it a disease when it comes to this stage with people. Here—I say, Perry!"

The butler, passing along the hall, heard Hatch's call, and stopped. She gave her cap-strings a fling backwards as she advanced to him.

"You are to go and tell Church to cut a basket of grapes, and to mix 'em, white and black. The very best and ripest that is in the greenhouse; they be for Miss Annabel."

"All right, I'll go at once," answered Perry. "But you need not snap a man's nose off, Hatch, or look as if you were going to eat him. What has put you out?"

"Enough has put me out; and you might know that, old Perry, if you had any sense," retorted Hatch. "When do I snap people's noses off—which it's my tone, I take it, that you mean—except I'm that bothered and worried I can't speak sweet?"

"Well, what's amiss?" asked Perry.

They were standing close together, and Hatch lowered her voice to a whisper. "The missis is going off again; I be certain sure on't."

"*No!*" cried Perry, full of dismay. "But, look here, Hatch"—suddenly diving into one of his pockets—"she can't have done it; here's the cellar key. I can be upon my word that there's not a drain of anything out."

"You always did have the brains of a turkey, you know, Perry," was Hatch's gracious rejoinder, "and I'm tired of reminding you of it. Who said missis had took anything? Not me. She haven't—yet. As you observe, there's nothing up for her to take. But she'll be ordering you to bring something up before to-morrow's over; perhaps before to-day is."

"Dear, dear!" lamented the faithful servant. "Don't you think you may be mistaken, Hatch? What do you judge by?"

"I judge by herself. I've not lived with my missis all these years without learning to notice signs and tokens. Her manner to-day and her restlessness is just as plain as the sun in the sky. I know what it means, and you'll know it too, as soon as she gives you her orders to unlock the cellar."

"Can nothing be done?" cried the unhappy Perry. "Could I *lose* the key of the cellar, do you think, Hatch? Would that be of any good?"

"It would hold good just as long as you'd be in getting a hammer and poker to break it open with; you've not got to deal with a pack of schoolboys that's under control," was Hatch's sarcastic reproof. "But I think there's one thing we might try, Perry, and that is, run

round to Mr. Close and tell him about it. Perhaps he could give her something to stop the craving."

"I'll go," said Perry. "I'll slip round when I've told Church about the grapes."

"And the carriage is ordered early—half-past two; so mind you are in readiness," concluded Hatch.

Perry went to the surgeon's, after delivering his orders to the gardener. But Mr. Close was not at home, and the man came away again without leaving any message; he did not choose to enter upon the subject with Mr. Dunn, the assistant. The latter inquired who was ill, and Perry replied that nobody was; he had only come to speak a private word to Mr. Close, which could wait. In point of fact, he meant to call later.

But the curiosity of Mr. Dunn, who was a very inquisitive young man, fonder of attending to other people's business than of doing his own, had been aroused by this. He considered Perry's manner rather mysterious, as well as the suppression of the message, and he enlarged upon the account to Mr. Close when he came in. Mr. Close made no particular rejoinder; but in his own mind he felt little doubt that Mrs. Brightman was breaking out again, and determined and go to see her when he had had his dinner.

Perry returned home, and waited on his mistress at luncheon, quaking inwardly all the time, as he subsequently confessed to Hatch, lest she should ask him for something that was not upon the table. However, she did not do so; but she was very restless, as Perry observed; she ate little, drank no water, and told Perry to bring her a cup of coffee.

At half-past two the carriage stood at the gate, the silver on the horses' harness glittering in the sun. Quickly enough appeared the procession from the house. Mrs. Brightman, upright and impassive, walking with a stately step; Hatch, a shawl or two upon her arm, holding an umbrella over her mistress to shade her from the sun; Perry in the rear, carrying the basket of grapes. Perry would attend his mistress in her drive, as usual, but not Hatch.

The servants were placing the shawls and the grapes in the carriage, and Mrs. Brightman, who hated anything to be done after she had taken her seat, was waiting to enter it, when Mr. Close, the surgeon, came bustling up.

"Going for a drive this fine day!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with Mrs. Brightman. "I'm glad of that. I had been thinking that perhaps you were not well."

"Why should you think so?" asked she.

"Well, Perry was round at my place this morning, and left a message that he wanted to see me. I ——"

Mr. Close suppressed the remainder of his speech as his gaze suddenly fell on Perry's startled face. The man had turned from the carriage, and was looking at him in helpless, beseeching terror. A

faithful retainer was Perry, an honest butler; but at a pinch his brains were no better than what Hatch had compared them with—those of a turkey.

Mrs. Brightman, her countenance taking its very haughtiest expression, gazed first at the doctor, then at Perry, as if demanding what this might mean; possibly, poor lady, she had a suspicion of it. But Hatch, ready Hatch, was equal to the occasion: *she* never lost her presence of mind.

"I told Perry he might just as well have asked young Mr. Dunn for 'em, when he came back without the drops," said she, facing the surgeon and speaking carelessly. "Your not being in didn't matter. It was some cough drops I sent him for; the same as those you've let us have before, Mr. Close. Our cook's cough is that bad, she can't sleep at night, nor let anybody else sleep that's within earshot of her room."

"Well, I came round in a hurry, thinking some of you might be suffering from this complaint that's going about," said Mr. Close, taking up the clue in an easy manner.

"That there spasadic cholera," assented Hatch.

"Cholera! It's not cholera. There's nothing of that sort about," said the surgeon. "But there's a good bit of influenza; I have half-a-dozen patients suffering from it. A spell of bright weather such as this, though, will soon drive it away. And I'll send you some of the drops when I get back, Hatch."

Mrs. Brightman advanced to the carriage; the surgeon was at hand to assist her in. Perry stood on the other side his mistress. Hatch had retreated to the gate and was looking on.

Suddenly, a yell, as of something unearthly, startled their ears. A fierce-looking bull, frightened probably by the passers-by on the road, and the prods given to it by the formidable stick of its driver, had dashed behind the carriage on to the foot-path, and set up that terrible roar. Mr. Close looked round, Perry did the same; whilst Mrs. Brightman, who was in the very act of getting into her carriage, and whose nerves were more sensitive than theirs, turned sharply round also and screamed.

Again Hatch came to the rescue. She had closed the umbrella and lodged it against the pillar of the gate, for here they were under the shade of trees. Seizing the umbrella now, she opened it with a great dash and noise, and rushed towards the bull, pointing it menacingly. The animal, no doubt more startled than they were, tore away and gained the high-road again. Then everyone had leisure to see that Mrs. Brightman was lying on the ground, partly under the carriage.

She must have fallen in turning round, partly from fright, partly from the moving of the carriage. The horses had also been somewhat startled by the bull's noise, and one of them began to prance. The coachman had his horses well in hand and soon quieted them but he had not been able to prevent the movement which had no doubt chiefly caused his mistress to fall.

They quickly drew her from under the carriage and attempted to raise her; but she cried out with such tones of agony that the surgeon feared she was seriously injured. As soon as possible she was conveyed indoors on a mattress. Another surgeon joined Mr. Close, and it was found that her leg was broken near the ankle.

When it had been set and the commotion was subsiding, Perry was despatched to Essex Street with the carriage and the bad news—the carriage to bring back Annabel.

"What was it you really came to my surgery for, Perry?" Mr. Close took an opportunity of asking him before he started.

"It was about my mistress, sir," answered the man. "Hatch felt quite sure, by signs and tokens, that Mrs. Brightman was going to —to—be ill again. She sent me to tell you, sir, and to ask if you couldn't give her something to stop it."

"Ah, I thought as much. But when I saw you all out there, your mistress looking well and about to take a drive, I concluded I had been mistaken," said the surgeon.

I had run upstairs during the afternoon to ask a question of Annabel, and was standing beside her at the drawing-room window, where she sat at work, when a carriage came swiftly down the street, and stopped at the door.

"Why, it is mamma's!" exclaimed Annabel, looking out.

"But I don't see her in it," I rejoined.

"Oh, she must be in it, Charles. Perry is on the box."

Perry was getting down, but was not quite so quick in his movements as a slim young footman would be. He rang the door bell, and I was fetched down to him. In two minutes afterwards I had disclosed the news to my wife, and brought Perry upstairs that she might herself question him. The tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Don't take on, Miss Annabel," said the man, feeling quite too much lost in the bad tidings to remember Annabel's new title. "There's not the least bit of danger, ma'am; Mr. Close bade me say it; all is sure to go on well."

"Did you bring the carriage for me, Perry?"

"Yes, ma'am, I did. And it was my mistress herself thought of it. When Mr. Close, or Hatch, one of 'em it was, I don't know which, told her they were going to send me for you, she said 'Let Perry take the carriage.' Oh, ma'am, indeed she is fully as well as she could be; it was only at first that she seemed faintish like."

Annabel went back in the carriage at once. I promised to follow her as early in the evening as I could get away. Relying upon the butler's assurance that Mrs. Brightman was not in the slightest danger; that on the contrary, it would be an illness of weeks, if not of months, there was no necessity for my accompanying Annabel at an inconvenient momemt.

"It is, in one sense, the luckiest thing that could have happened

to her," Mr. Close remarked to me that evening when we were conversing together.

"Lucky! How do you mean?"

"Well, she *must* be under our control now," he answered in significant tones, "and we were fearing, only to-day, that she was on the point of breaking out again. A long spell of enforced abstinence such as this may effect wonders."

Of course, looking at it in that light, the accident might be called fortunate. "There's a silver lining to every cloud."

Annabel took up her abode temporarily at her mother's: Mrs. Brightman requested it. I went down there of an evening—though not every evening—returning to Essex Street in the morning. Tom's increasing illness kept me in town occasionally, for I could not help going to see him, and he was growing weaker day by day. The closing features of consumption were gaining upon him rapidly. To add to our difficulties, Mr. Policeman Wren, who seemed to follow Tom's changes of domicile in a very ominous and remarkable manner, had now transferred his beat from Southwark, and might be seen pacing before Lennard's door ten times a day.

One morning when I had come up from Clapham and was seated in my own room opening the letters, Lennard entered. He closed the door with a quiet, cautious movement and waited, without speaking.

"Anything particular, Lennard?"

"Yes, sir; I've brought rather bad news," he said. "Captain Heriot is worse."

"Worse? In what way? But he is not Captain Heriot, Lennard; he is Mr. Brown. Be careful."

"We cannot be overheard," he answered, glancing at the closed door. "He appeared so exceedingly weak last night that I thought I would sit up with him for an hour or two, and then lie down on his sofa for the rest of the night. About five o'clock this morning, he had a violent fit of coughing and broke a blood vessel."

"What did you do?"

"I know a little of the treatment necessary in such cases, and we got the doctor to him as soon as possible. Mr. Purfleet does not give the slightest hope now. In fact, he thinks that a very few days more will bring the ending."

I sat back in my chair. Poor Tom! Poor Tom!

"It is the best for him, Mr. Charles," spoke Lennard, with some emotion. "Better, infinitely, than that of which he has been running the risk. When a man's life is marred as he has marred his, Heaven must seem like a haven of refuge to him."

"Has he any idea of his critical state?"

"Yes; and I feel sure is quite reconciled to it. He remarked this morning how much he should like to see Blanche: meaning, I presume, Lady Level."

"Ah, but there are difficulties in the way, Lennard. I will come to him myself, but not until evening. There's no immediate danger, you tell me, and I do not care to be seen entering your house during the day while he is in it. That big policeman might be on the watch, and ask me what I wanted there."

Lennard left the room and I returned to my letters. The next I took up was a note from Blanche. Lord Level was not *yet* back from Marshdale, she told me in it; he kept writing miserable scraps of notes in which he put her off with excuses from day to day, always assuring her he hoped to be up on the morrow. But she could see she was being played with; and the patience which, in obedience to me and Major Carlen, she had been exercising, was very nearly exhausted. She wrote this, she concluded by saying, to warn me that it was so.

Truth to say, I did wonder what was keeping Level at Marshdale. He had been there more than a week now.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LAST DAYS.

Tom Heriot lay on his sofa in his bedroom, the fire-light flickering on his faded face. This was Monday, the third day since the attack spoken of by Lennard, and there had not been any return of it. His voice was stronger this evening; he seemed better altogether, and was jesting, as he loved to do. Leah had been to see him during the day, and he was recounting one or two of their passages-at-arms, with much glee.

"Charley, old fellow, you look as solemn as a judge."

Most likely I did. I sat on the other side the hearthrug, gazing as I listened to him; and I thought I saw in his face the greyness that frequently precedes death.

"Did you know that that giant of the force, Wren, had his eye upon me, Charley?"

"No! Why do you say so?"

"Well, I think he has—some suspicion, at any rate. He parades before the house like a walking apparition. I look at him from behind the curtains in the other room. He paraded in like manner, you know, before that house in Southwark and the other one in Lambeth."

"It may be only a coincidence, Tom. The police are moved about a good deal from beat to beat, I fancy."

"Perhaps so," assented Tom carelessly. "If he came in and took me I don't think he could do much with me now. He accosted Purfleet to-day."

"Accosted Purfleet!"

Tom nodded. "After his morning visit to me, he went dashing out of the street-door in his usual quick way, and dashed against

Wren. One might think a regiment of soldiers were always waiting to have their legs and arms cut off, and that Purfleet had to do it, by the way he rushes about," concluded Tom.

"Well?"

"'In a hurry this morning, doctor,' says old Wren, who is uncommonly fond of hearing himself talk. 'And who is it that's ill at Mr. Lennard's?' 'I generally am in a hurry,' says Purfleet, 'and so would you be if you had as many sick people on your hands. At Lennard's? Why that poor suffering daughter of his has had another attack, and I don't know whether I shall save her.' And, with that, Purfleet got away. He related this to me when he came in at tea-time."

A thought struck me. "But, Tom, does Purfleet know that you are in concealment here? Or why should he have put his visits to you upon Maria Lennard?"

"Why, how could he be off knowing it? Lennard asked him at first, as a matter of precaution, not to speak of me in the neighbourhood. Mr. Brown was rather under a cloud just now, he said. I wouldn't mind betting a silver sixpence, Charley, that he knows I am Tom Heriot."

I wondered whether Tom was joking.

"Likely enough," went on Tom. "He knows that you come to see me, and that you are Mr. Strange of Essex Street. And he has heard, I'll lay, that Mr. Strange had a wicked sort of half-brother, one Captain Heriot, who fell into the fetters of the law and escaped them, and—and may be the very Mr. Brown who's lying ill here. Purfleet can put two and two together as cleverly as other people, Charles."

"If so, it is frightfully hazardous ——"

"Not at all," interrupted Tom with equanimity. "He'd no more betray me, Charley, than he'd betray himself. Doctors don't divulge the secrets of their patients; they keep them. It is a point of honour in the medical code: as well as of self-interest. What family would call in a man who was known to run about saying the Smiths next door had veal for dinner to-day, and they ought to have had mutton? If no more harm reaches me than any brought about by Purfleet, I am safe enough."

It might be as he said. And I saw that he would be incautious to the end.

At that moment Mrs. Lennard came in with something in a breakfast cup. "You are a good lady," said Tom gratefully. "See how they feed me up, Charley."

But for the hollow tones, the hectic flush and the brilliant eyes, it might almost have been thought he was getting better. The cough had nearly left him, and the weakness was not more apparent than it had been for a week past. But that faint, deep, *far away* sounding voice, which had now come on, told the truth—that the close was near at hand.

After Mrs. Lennard had left the room with the empty cup, Tom lay back on the sofa, put his head on the pillow, and in a minute or two seemed to be asleep. Presently I moved gently across the hearthrug to fold the warm, light quilt upon his knees. He opened his eyes.

"You need not creep, Charley. I am not asleep. I had a regular good sleep in the afternoon, and don't feel inclined for it now. I was thinking about the funeral."

"The funeral!" I echoed, taken back. "Whose funeral?"

"Mine. They won't care to lay me by my mother, will they? I mean my own mother. The world might put its inquisitive word in, and say that must be Tom Heriot, the felon. Neither you nor Level would like that, nor old Carlen either."

I made no answer; uncertain what to say.

"Yet I should like to lie by her," he went on. "There was a large vault made, when she died, to hold the three of us—herself, my father and me. *They* are in it; I should like to be placed with them."

"Time enough to think of that, Tom, when—when—the time comes," I stammered.

"The time's not far off now, Charley."

"Two nights ago, when I was here, you assured me you were getting better."

"Well, I thought I might be; there are such ups and downs in a man's state. He will appear sick unto death to-day, and to-morrow be driving down to a whitebait dinner at Greenwich. I've changed my opinion, Charley; I've had my warning."

"Had your warning! What does that mean?"

"I should like to see Blanche," he whispered. "Dear little Blanche! How I used to tease her in our young days, and Leah would box my ears for it; and I teased you also, Charley. Could you not bring her here, if Level would let her come?"

"Tom, I hardly know. For one thing, she has not heard anything of the past trouble, as you are aware. She thinks you are in India with the regiment, and calls you a very undutiful brother for not writing to her. I suppose it might be managed."

"Dear little Blanche!" he repeated. "Yes, I teased her—and loved her all the time. Just one visit, Charley. It will be the last until we meet upon the eternal shore. Try and contrive it."

I sat thinking how it might be done—the revelation to Blanche, bringing her to the house, and obtaining the consent of Lord Level; for I should not care to stir in it without his consent. Tom appeared to be thinking also, and a silence ensued. It was he who broke it.

"Charles!"

"Yes?"

"Do you ever recall events that passed in our old life at White Littleham Rectory; do any of them lie in your memory?"

"I think all of them lie in it," I answered. "My memory is, you know, a remarkably good one."

"Ay," said Tom. And then he paused again. "Do you recollect that especial incident when your father told us of his dream?" he continued presently. "I picture the scene now; it has been present to my mind all day. A frosty winter morning, icicles on the trees and frosty devices on the window-panes. You and I and your father seated round the breakfast-table; Leah pouring out the coffee and cutting bread-and-butter for us. He appeared to be in deep thought, and when I remarked upon it, and you asked him what he was thinking of, he said his dream. D'you mind it, lad?"

"I do. The thing made an impression on me. The scene and what passed at it are as plain to me now as though it had happened yesterday. After saying he was thinking of his dream, he added, in a dubious tone, 'if it *was* a dream!' Mr. Penthorn came in while he was telling it."

"He was fast asleep; had gone to bed in the best of health, probably concocting matter for next Sunday's sermon," resumed Tom, recalling the facts. "Suddenly, he awoke by the sound of a voice. It was his late wife's voice; your mother, Charley. He was wide awake on the instant, and knew the voice for hers; she appeared to be standing at the bed-side."

"But he did not see her," I put in.

"No; he never said he saw her," replied Tom Heriot. "But the impression was upon him that a figure stood there, and that after speaking it retreated towards the window. He got up and struck a light and found the room empty, no trace of anyone's having been in it. Nevertheless, he could not get rid of the belief, though not a superstitious man, that it was his wife who came to him."

"In the spirit."

"In the spirit, of course. He knew her voice perfectly, he said. Mr. Penthorn rather ridiculed the matter; saying it was nothing but a vivid dream. I don't think it made much impression upon your father, except that it puzzled him."

"I don't think it did," I assented, my thoughts all in the past. "As you observe, Tom, he was not superstitious; he held no particular belief in the supernatural."

"No; it faded from all our minds with the day—Leah's perhaps excepted. But what was the result? On the fourth night afterwards he died. The dream occurred on the Friday morning a little before three o'clock; your father looked at his watch when he got out of bed and saw that it wanted a quarter to three. On Tuesday morning at a quarter to three he died in his study, into which he had been carried after his accident."

All true. The circumstances, to me, were painful even now.

"Well, what do you make of it, Charles?"

"Nothing. But I don't quite understand your question."

"Do you think his wife really came to him?—That she was permitted to come back to earth to warn him of his approaching death?"

"I have always believed that. I can hardly see how anyone could doubt it."

"Well, Charley, I did. I was a graceless, light-headed young wight, you know, and serious things made no impression on me. If I thought about it at all, it was to put it down to fancy; or a dream, as Mr. Penthorn said; and I don't believe I've ever had the thing in my mind from that time to this."

"And why should it come back to you now?" I asked.

"Because," answered Tom, "I think I have had a similar warning."

"What can you mean, Tom?"

"It was last night," he answered; "or, rather, this morning. I was in bed, and pretty soundly asleep, for me, and I began to dream. I thought I saw my father come in through the door, that one opening to the passage, cross the room and sit down by the bed-side with his face turned to me. I mean my own father, Colonel Heriot. He looked just as he used to look; not a day older; his fine figure erect, his bright, wavy hair brushed off his brow as he always wore it, his blue eyes smiling and kindly. I was not in the least surprised to see him; his coming in seemed to be quite a matter of course. 'Well, Thomas,' he began, looking hard at me after he had sat down; 'we have been parted for some time and I have much to say to you.' 'Say it now, papa,' I answered, going back in my dream to the language of childhood's days. 'There's not time now,' he replied; 'we must wait a little yet; it won't be for long, Thomas.' Then I saw him rise from the chair, re-cross the room to the door, turn to look at me with a smile, and go out, leaving the door open. I awoke in a moment; at the very moment, I am certain; and for some little time I could not persuade myself that what had passed was not reality. The chair in which he had sat stood at the bed-side, and the door was wide open."

"But I suppose the chair had been there all night, and that someone was sitting up with you? Whoever it was must have opened the door."

"The chair had been there all night," assented Tom. "But the door had *not* been opened by human hands, so far as I can learn. It was old Faith's turn to sit up last night—that worthy old soul of a servant who has clung to the Lennards through all their misfortunes. Finding that I slept comfortably, Faith had fallen asleep too in the big chair in that corner behind you. She declared that the door had been firmly shut—and I believe she thought it was I who had got up and opened it."

"It was a dream, Tom."

"Granted. But it was a warning. It came—nay, who can say it

was not *he* who came—to show me that I shall soon be with him. We shall have time, and to spare, to talk then. I have never had so vivid a dream in my life; or one that so left behind it the impression that it had been reality."

"Well ——"

"Look here," he interrupted. "Your father said, if you remember, that the visit paid to him, whether real or imaginary, by his wife and the words she spoke, had revived within him his recollections of her voice, which had in a slight degree begun to fade. Well, Charles, I give you my word that I had partly forgotten my father's appearance; I was only a little fellow when he died; but his visit to me in my dream last night has brought it back most vividly. Come, you wise old lawyer, what do you say to that?"

"I don't know, Tom. Such things *are*, I suppose."

"If I got well and lived to be a hundred years old, I should never laugh at them again."

"Did you tell Leah this when she was here to-day?"

"Ay; and of course she burst out crying. 'Take it as it's meant, Master Tom,' said she 'and prepare yourself. It is your warning.' Just as she had told your father, Charles, that that other was *his* warning. She was right then; she is right now."

"You cannot know it. And you must not let this trouble you."

"It does not trouble me," he answered quickly. "Rather the contrary, for it sets my mind at rest. I have had little hope of myself for some time past, and this dream-visit of my father has shown me the truth beyond all doubt; and now I have only to make my packet, as the French say, and wait for the signal to start."

We talked together a little longer, but my time was up. I left him for the night and apparently in the best of spirits.

Lennard was alone when I got downstairs. I asked him whether he had heard of this fancy of Tom's about the dream.

"Yes," he answered. "He told me about it this evening, when I was sitting with him after tea; but he did not seem at all depressed by it. I don't think it matters much either way," added Lennard thoughtfully, "for the end cannot be far off now."

"He has an idea that Purfleet guesses who he really is."

"But he has no grounds for saying it," returned Lennard. "Purfleet heard when he was first called in that 'Mr. Brown' wished to be kept en cachette, if I may so put it; but that he should guess him to be Captain Heriot is quite improbable. Because Captain Heriot is aware of his own identity, he assumes that other people must needs be aware of it."

"One might trust Purfleet not to betray him, I fancy, if he does guess it."

"That I am sure of," said Lennard warmly. "He is kind and benevolent. Most medical men are so from their frequent contact with the dark shades of life, whether of sickness or of sorrow. As

to Purfleet, he is too hard-worked, poor man, to have much leisure for speculating upon the affairs of other people."

"Wren is still walking about here."

"Yes; but I think he has been put upon this beat in the ordinary routine of things, not that he is looking after anyone in particular. Mr. Strange, if he had any suspicion of Captain Heriot in Lambeth, he would have taken him; he would have taken him again when in Southwark; and he would, ere this, have taken him here. Wren appears to be one of those gossiping men who must talk to everybody; and I believe that is just all the mystery."

Wishing Lennard good night, I went home to Essex Street, and sat down to write to Lord Level. He would not receive the letter at Marshdale until the following afternoon, but it would be in time for him to answer me by the evening post.

(To be concluded.)

THE KISS.

The snows are white on wood and wold,
  The wind is in the firs;
So dead my heart is with the cold,
  No pulse within it stirs,
Even to see your face, my dear,
  Your face that was my sun:
The ice enshrouds the buried year,
  And summer's dreams are done.

The snakes that lie about my heart
  Are in their wintry sleep:
Their fangs no more deal sting and smart,
  No more they curl and creep.
Love with the rose has ceased to be,
  The frost is firm and fast;
Oh! keep the summer far from me,
  And let the snakes' sleep last!

Touch of your hand could not suffice
  To waken them once more,
Nor could the sunshine of your eyes
  A ruined spring restore.
But ah! your lips! You know the rest:
  The snows are summer rain;
My eyes are wet, and in my breast
  The snakes' fangs meet again.

E. Nesbit.

PRECEPTS FOR THE WELL-ORDERING OF LIFE.

ON PATIENCE.

"ALL things come to him who can wait," says the French proverb. And indeed there can hardly be a better test of a man's general capacity than his powers of waiting. Just self-appreciation, ability to judge one's own worth, are wrapt up in it; and no end of traits besides, as self-control and will.

For it is not to be assumed for a moment that the proverb means a mere listless standing idle—that would be nonsense—but rather educated self-dependence, which can go along quietly in the faith of justice, and wait for a due recognition being in good time accorded to work well done: and if the latter never comes, there is the satisfaction of having done the work well.

There is an Eastern proverb which quaintly puts the same truth: "Time and patience change the mulberry leaf to satin;" and a Kanuri proverb, for quaintness and beauty, may well be put alongside it: "At the bottom of patience there is heaven."

On no point are great writers more at one than on this, and their deliverances might be regarded as sermons on the texts of proverbs that are to be found amongst all peoples—savage as well as civilised—in praise of the virtue of patience. Thus we find Theocritus singing:—

> "Yet, patience, friend! to-morrow fortune's ray
> May shine with comfort, though it lowers to day;
> Hopes to the living, not the dead remain,
> And the soft season brightens after rain."

Patience is a kind of passive courage. More true courage, indeed, is shown in it than by the heroes of great military achievements, for they always have the accompaniments of excitement and sympathy.

Patience is more especially a virtue of women than of men, and what gracious heroines, martyrs, saints may they not become by the practice of it. This is the view of our great dramatists: of Shakespeare in particular, whose grandest heroines exhibit the quality in the most effective circumstances.

The tendency of men is to expect the immediate results of their work and effort; women, both from their education and their constitution, are less exacting as regards outward results. They rest

more on the satisfaction of work duly done. In "Macbeth" we have this expression :—

> "Come what, come may,
> Time and the hour run through the roughest day."

"To know how to wait," says the wise de Maistre, "is the great secret of success." Sir Walter Scott was especially good in praise of patience, as though it was a virtue he had himself often put to the test. "Do not let your impatience mar the web of your prudence," he makes one of his characters say to another; and he thus, in one of his poems, puts the sentiment to rhyme :—

> "Be patient, be patient, for patience hath power
> To ward us in danger like mantle in shower."

Longfellow, like Sir Walter Scott, seems to have felt himself indebted to patience. Not only in his poems, but in his prose writings, he magnifies it. No one will ever forget the lines :—

> "Still achieving, still pursuing,
> Learn to labour and to wait."

which we accept as but another fine rendering of the French proverb with which we started; and in "Hyperion" we have this admirable piece of eloquence :

"After all," continued Fleming, "perhaps the greatest lesson which can be taught us is told in a single word—Wait! Every man must patiently bide his time. He must wait. More particularly in lands like my native land, where the pulse of life beats with such feverish and impatient throbs, is the lesson needful. We seem to live in the midst of a battle—there is such a din, such a hurrying to and fro. In the streets of a crowded city it is difficult to walk slowly. You feel the rushing of the crowd and rush with it onward. In the press of our life it is difficult to be calm. In this stress of wind and tide all professions seem to drag their anchors, and are swept out into the main. The voices of the present say—Come! But the voices of the past say—Wait! With calm and solemn footsteps the rising tide bears against the rushing torrent up stream, and pushes back the hurrying waters. With no less calm and solemn footsteps, nor less certainty, does a great mind bear up against opposition or public opinion, and push back the hurrying stream. Therefore should every man wait—should bide his time. Not in listless idleness, not in useless pastime, not in querulous dejection; but in constant, steady, cheerful endeavour, always willing and fulfilling and accomplishing his task, that, when the occasion comes, he may be equal to the occasion. . . . Believe me, the talent of success is nothing more than doing what you can do well, and doing well whatever you do."

In Douglas Jerrold's "Hermit" we have this fine parable :—

"Patience!—why, patience wanted a nightingale; patience waited, and the egg sang." Cowper was not a man of action, but a recluse and a student, but he had his own toils and inward struggles against melancholy, and thus he sings:—

> "Beware of desperate steps! the darkest day,
> Live till to-morrow, will have passed away."

Benjamin Franklin, who was a practical man and knew nothing of the sensitive tortures of Cowper, is at one with him here: "By diligence and patience the mouse cut in two the cable." Mrs. Browning emphasises the same truth through the mouth of her heroine, Aurora Leigh:

> "I worked with patience, which means almost power."

Goethe's works teem with tributes to a virtue which certainly he did not fail to practice.

"Was the world not made at once, then?" asked Felix, in "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre."

"Hardly," answered Jarno; "good bread needs baking."

And here is an anecdote which puts the same truth in a more playful, if not more apt, manner than the preceding:

"You can do anything if you have only patience," said an old uncle, who had made a fortune, to a nephew who had nearly spent one. "Water may be carried in a sieve, if you can only wait."

"How long?" asked the petulant spendthrift, who was impatient for the old man's obituary.

His uncle coolly replied: "Till it freezes!"

Patience in a leader is a necessary quality. This the Duke of Wellington possessed, and in this he outdid his great enemy, Napoleon, who had, perhaps, far more of what we call inborn genius. But even that, without patience, will not suffice in the end. Genius, without patience, is apt to become, instead of a blessing, a curse. Napoleon often showed querulous impatience, and was apt to distribute his smiles or frowns very arbitrarily through this tendency. A writer in the *Saturday Review* has put this point so well and forcibly that we must quote his words:—

"As a rule, nothing more incapacitates a man for the lead than impatience. No constitutionally impatient man, who has indulged his tendency, ever gets to the bottom of things, or knows with any nicety the standing, disposition and circumstances of the people he is thrown, or has thrown himself, amongst. Certain salient points he is possessed of, but not what reconciles and accounts for them. Something in him—an obtrusive self, or a train of thought, or likings and antipathies—will always come between him and an impartial judgment. Neither does he win confidence, for he checks the coy, uncertain advances which are the precursors of it. We doubt if a thoroughly impatient man can read the heart, or be a fair critic, or

understand the rights of any knotty question, or make himself master of any difficult situation. The power of waiting, deliberating, hanging in suspense, is necessary for all these—the power of staving off for considerable periods of time mere personal leanings. We shall constantly find impatient persons, whatever their natural powers, possessed by mistaken impressions, and taking mistaken views of people and things. . . . We have spoken of waiting as a power, and much might be said on this point; for to know how long to wait, and when to cease waiting, how long to pause and when to resolve, constitutes in no small degree the virtue of punctuality and the proper limits of patience."

Frederick von Logau, from whom the poet Longfellow drew some of his inspirations, has this neat verselet among his axioms :—

> "Softly goes he o'er the ways
> Who Patience to the burden lays."

Mr. Ruskin in his "Ethics of the Dust" has such an exquisite prose-hymn in praise of patience as the perfecter of work, and the only true medium of enjoyment for the workers, that we must crave leave to quote it :—

"There is no music in a rest, Katie, that I know of; but there's the making of music in it. And people are always missing that part of the life-melody, and scrambling on without counting—not that it's easy to count; but nothing on which so much depends ever *is* easy. People are always talking of perseverance and courage, and fortitude; but patience is the finest and worthiest part of fortitude—and the rarest, too. I know twenty persevering girls for one patient one; but it is only that twenty-first one who can do her work, out and out, and enjoy it. For patience lies at the root of all pleasures, as well as of all powers. Hope herself ceases to be happiness, when Impatience companions her. . . . The Patience who really smiles at grief usually stands, or walks, or even runs; she seldom sits; though she may sometimes *have* to do it, for many a day, poor thing, by monuments; or like Chaucer's, with face pale, upon a hill of sand."

THE DUEL.

I.

I DO not hate tourists, but for one who spends the most of the year in cities like Rome and Florence, it is desirable to get away from society for the summer holidays, and live alone with books and nature, among unsophisticated peasants.

I once found a glorious spot, absolutely cut off from the world, there being no road to it, the traveller having to descend the mountain by a break-neck path on horseback. It was perfectly primitive, the people wild and shy, very poor, but not begging at all. It is true there was hardly anything to eat except dark, sour bread and wine. I had prudently provided myself with coffee; could I have some milk? Yes, but the cows had not come home yet. At what hour did they return? It was uncertain; whenever they felt disposed. When I asked for a candle the girl brought me a taper about a yard long, which she put into my hand as if I were going to walk in a religious procession, and which she had sacrilegiously taken from the church.

"Here is an undiscovered country," I said, and began to think how I was to make the rooms habitable. I suddenly remembered having seen a square, ugly, tasteless house inside a large enclosure with a gate, and I asked the young woman who was the owner. She named him, adding: "That is the new hotel."

"What!" I exclaimed. "An hotel, when you have no road even for oxen!"

"Oh," said the pretty creature, rippling all over with smiles at the joyous intelligence: "they are just beginning to make a road on *the other side of the mountain!*"

I ruefully packed my valise and departed next morning. Then I began a series of excursions, travelling exclusively by diligence. In these conveyances I never met a man or woman of my race, and, needless to say, none of the upper class Italians, who use their own carriages going to and fro between the city and their villas. I had thus a good opportunity of improving my acquaintance with the people. And I like the *popolo Tuscano;* they are courteous, intelligent, honest; and if they only could be persuaded to use a little more soap and water they would be "the finest peasantry in the world."

The diligences were cheap and uncomfortable; the cheapness, it must be confessed, did not come amiss to a poor young author fond of rambling; and for the rest one learns to "adapt himself" to circumstances, as the Italians express it. There was a seat outside, just behind the driver, which held three persons, and when this

was fully occupied it closed up the best ventilation we had. My heart used to sink when I beheld a pair of dirty red-brown shoes mounting, and found my favourite window darkened by the capacious back of a farmer, butcher, baker, or blacksmith, as the case might be.

One day, looking out through a side window, I saw a well-made, gentlemanly figure in a perfectly-fitting suit of summer grey spring lightly to the front seat, showing a small aristocratic boot with an arched instep. The young man had his back to my favourite window, but being slight, he did not close it up, and when he saw me looking out he politely moved to one side. He wore gloves, too; a rather unusual thing in the diligence; for when an exceptionally fastidious person appeared with gloves, he or she soon removed them, seeing that they were not the mode and out of place.

After a stage or two the gentleman presented himself at the door, and said: "The sun is so hot that I should like to come inside if it will not inconvenience these gentlemen."

"Venga, venga," was the general answer, and all made room with that ready courtesy which seldom fails in a Tuscan assembly of any class. The young man got to the upper end of the coach, opposite to me, and next a priest. They saluted each other by name, and shook hands.

"Padre Morelli!"

"Signor Giuliocesare! You are going to your castello for a little fresh air?" returned the priest.

"Yes; and to look after the contadini. And you?"

"I go precisely in the same direction, to the fête of San Severino. The Curato is a friend of mine, and has invited me to assist at the functions. This weather one is glad to escape from the town for a few days. San Severino is cool and pleasant."

"How high above sea level is San Severino," I asked.

"I do not exactly know. I am not curious!" replied the priest. But the young man, who rejoiced in the name of Julius Cæsar, told me.

"I am not actuated by idle curiosity," I replied. "I am in search of a cool, tranquil spot, where I can spend two or three months of summer."

"You would be tired of San Severino in two days," observed the young man. "There is no object of interest. The church is quite ordinary, unadorned by works of art of any merit. It is a poor village commune of about one thousand souls. The only recommendation is the fine air and the pleasing landscape."

"Is there any sort of hotel where one could be accommodated?"

"Che, che!"

"I am not difficult. I can adapt myself."

"Well, I believe there is a spare room at the café, though I never heard of anyone occupying it."

"And where do travellers put up?"

"Travellers? My dear sir, no travellers ever come to the out-of-the-way, God-forgotton spot which is San Severino," replied Julius Cæsar.

"But the diligence is full of people."

"These belong to the places in the neighbouring country. If an occasional visitor arrives, he is entertained at the house of his relatives or friends."

"Delightful!" I exclaimed. "This is the place I have long sought in vain."

At this the reverendo pricked up his ears and eyed me suspiciously. Drawing his long black gown over his knees with a cautious air, he said:

"The signore is tired of society?"

"Yes; I seek retirement for a time."

"Why not go into a monastery?"

"Is there a monastery where an extern might lodge?" I inquired.

"A very fine Franciscan monastery not half a mile from the town. Alas! it is not what it once was; but for one who seeks a temporary retirement its gates are open."

The young man smiled and said:

"But, reverendo, the English gentleman might not care for the society of the good frati always lamenting their wrongs."

"It depends," returned the priest. And they both looked at me expecting me to say with what party I sympathised. I maintained a reserved tone, and replied:

"I should live by myself, occupied with my own studies." I think the priest suspected that I was a fugitive, if not from the law, at least from society, and that the sanctuary of a monastery was just suited to my case.

The conversation then turned on the difficulties of our respective languages, and I found Signor Giuliocesare knew some English, as most young Italians do now, and was familiar with our best authors, which he read in the original. This was a pleasing variety in the monotony of diligence travelling; but I was destined to have another surprise in the course of the journey.

We were congratulating ourselves on the departure of two peasants, and enjoying the room they had vacated, when the coach pulled up at the gate of a villa. There was a party of five, but only three wanted seats. A handsome, blooming young lady with a radiant complexion and little auburn curls on her white forehead; dress, an intricate blending of black and crushed strawberry, a hat turned up at one side, long silk gloves, and gold bracelets outside them. A second lady, still younger, slight, dark-haired, in a cream-coloured china silk dust cloak, broad-leaved Tuscan hat, with a little trembling sheaf of corn and poppies mixed. A beautiful child of three or four years, evidently the daughter of the handsome blonde, in white frock and blue sash—little frock and much sash. The girl in the dust

cloak and straw hat was silent and quiet, while the handsome lady in crushed strawberry was talkative and vivacious.

"Per l'amor di cielo!" she exclaimed: "is this the vehicle that they put on the road in such murderous heat? Can you give a seat outside to the signorina? She cannot bear the close air inside. Make her ill? Yes, surely. It would make anyone ill. My dear, you must hold your face to the window; there's no help for it. Good-bye, Luigi; good-bye, Emilia: many thanks. If you only knew what a delicious place this is! It is an inferno!"

And the lady smiled sweetly as she waved her fan to her friends, and then looked round at her fellow passengers with a compassionating air. At that moment she caught the eye of the young advocate —I had learnt his profession from his talk with the priest—who was just saluting her companion.

They shook hands, evidently surprised at meeting each other there, and the lady explained that an accident to a horse had obliged them to return to their own villa in the diligence. They seemed pleased to see each other, and began to talk in an animated manner. Giuliocesare caressed the child, stroked her long, golden hair, and when she insisted on standing on the seat to look out, he held her carefully by the big sash. The lovely sprite, like most pretty children, knew she was admired, and was full of bewitching coquetries. Young Italians are much more fond of children than young Englishmen; but still, I half expected that so much devotion to the infant was partly for the sake of the pretty mamma.

"Are you sleepy, Minerva?" asked the married lady suddenly.

"No: why sleepy?" returned the girl.

"You are so silent."

"I hope the heat does not incommode the signorina," said the advocate. "Would you like my place? It is more shady. Yes, pray do me the favour."

And he handed her with a stately politeness to his corner.

She was now opposite me, and I began to observe her, as one cannot help doing when one is vis-à-vis with another in a coach. She had a clear, pale skin, brown hair and soft brown eyes: not so striking or attractive in appearance as her companion, but thoughtful and interesting. Her hands were very small, and the thin silk gloves she wore did not conceal their beautiful form.

Signor Giuliocesare had drawn me into the conversation by asking me questions about England for the benefit of the ladies: and so I began to talk a little to them, too, and had the pleasure of hearing my own language spoken tolerably by the young lady, and lisped very prettily by the child, whom she had taught, who was her cousin. The time passed much more pleasantly than usual in the diligence, and it seemed but a short space when the ladies got out at the gate of their villa, about two miles from San Severino.

"Ecco casa mia," said the advocate, as we approached the ancient

village, pointing to an imposing edifice standing on a slight eminence, with a high square tower.

"What a grand old castle! And do you live there all alone with your servants, signore?" I asked: for I had been informed previously that he had no parents or family. He laughed.

"I occupy a very modest quarter on the ground floor. My retainers are very easily accommodated. A contadino and his wife, who live on the premises, lend me all the service I need."

"What a pity!" I exclaimed, thinking I saw before me the last scion of a decayed noble family. "I suppose you are much attached to your ancestral home?"

"It is not my ancestral home. My father bought it with the farm."

I suppose I looked disappointed at the romance being spoiled, for the young man's face wore a sarcastic smile as he said: "We are not all counts and marquises now-a-days, though there are still enough, Heaven knows!"

"He belongs to a good old family, nevertheless," put in the priest, "who might have borne a title if they pleased. But Signor Rosignoli is a fierce democrat."

"He has names long enough for a Spanish hidalgo," I thought within myself. "What business has a lawyer to be called Julius Cæsar Rosignoli?" And the young man said:

"What the good Padre calls a fierce democrat is a very moderate Liberal. I assure you I am not an Internationalist or a Nihilist. If you will do me the pleasure of calling as soon as you have settled on your lodging, I will show you a fine view from my tower."

He handed me his card, and I offered him mine, as I replied: "Most willingly."

"What an intelligent, charming young fellow that is," I said to the priest, when he was gone.

"Yes; and he is very upright and honest, though somewhat extravagant in his ideas."

I did not pursue the subject, for I knew wherein they differed; it was the everlasting question of Church property appropriated by the State. We drew up in the main street of the village near the restaurant, or inn. The priest took off his broad-brimmed hat, said he had the honour to salute me, and trotted off to the curate's house. I ordered dinner at the inn, but hesitated to engage the room, that looked into a dirty lane with high houses, and washings suspended from the upper floor windows. I conceived the bold idea of calling on the Syndic and enlisting his services.

The Syndic was an important magnate, who owned property and lived in a "palazzo;" but he received me with great courtesy, asked what was my "revered name," and what my scope or object in remaining in San Severino, which seemed an unaccountable whim to him; and, being satisfied on these points, he promised to make

inquiries about lodgings for me. When I came out from the presence of the magistrate I happened to meet my new friend Giuliocesare, who carried me off to his castle.

II.

THERE were two enormous stone pillars at the entrance of a short avenue of cypresses, but the gate had disappeared. The avenue was trim and clean, and at either side of it were thickly planted and well-cared-for olives, figs, vines, mulberries and acacias, making a pleasant shade. The orchards were quite unprotected, yet the owner assured me that he had never been robbed. The building covered a large space of ground enclosing a square court, into which we passed under the great tower. The gate of this had also been removed, and opposite the open entrance was the stable, with a fresco over the door. The rest of the walls were washed a sober yellow brown, not out of keeping with the venerable aspect of the castle. There were no grasses or cobwebs or dust; everything was neat and orderly, and there was a great abundance of water. Two pumps close to the house, and in the garden a spring-well of such profundity and purity that the late owner, the father of Giuliocesare, had built an imposing covering to it that looked like a gothic chapel.

"We have great respect for pure water; and this is, *proprio una galanteria*," said the master with a smile. "My poor tenants appreciate it."

In the courtyard my host opened a door to the left which led into a vast salon with lofty frescoed ceiling, furnished alla antica. One door out of this apartment opened into the bed-chamber of the master, which had still an inner room beyond it. Another door led to a little range of buildings which had been added on to the castle at a later period than that of its foundation; and here I was introduced to the dining-room and kitchen.

We sat down in the semi-twilight of the lofty salon, enjoying the delicious coolness secured by its thick, impenetrable walls. When my eyes got accustomed to the dimness, I looked round at the massive antique furniture and the pictures. Instead of ancestral portraits in velvet and lace ruffles, with pointed beards and wicked eyes, I met the familiar faces of modern men who had made Italy a nation.

"Victor Emmanuel, Cavour, La Marmora, Azeglio, Ricasoli, Farini," said Signor Rosignoli, presenting them in turn.

"And Garibaldi?" I asked.

"Here he is in the place of honour at the end of the room," he replied, opening a window to let in a little light. "And here," pointing to a large photograph framed in carved wood—"here is a foreigner who still must stand among those who have contributed to make Italy; to whom we owe a deep debt of gratitude. The greatest and noblest man in England—nay, in Europe."

I did not need to look at the picture to see whose it was; I had so often heard Italians express themselves in the same terms. I felt a thrill of pride and pleasure, as is natural when one hears a great compatriot praised in a foreign land and a foreign tongue. But I did not show any pleasure.

"A very good likeness, and a handsome frame," I remarked. "Signore, you are a true type of the Nuova Italia; the old narrow *family* pride is sunk in the new *national* pride. But do not they seem somewhat out of place—these modern heroes in this old fortress which belonged to the Age of the Despots?"

"It belonged to a real despot—the Duke of Athens," he replied. "Out of place? No. We living men are dreadfully modern and common-place, are we not? Yet we surround ourselves with antique furniture, china and pictures—when we can afford them—undisturbed by the incongruity of our own presence among them. We enjoy the shelter of these ancient walls, whilst we dress, think and act like nineteenth-century men. Why should we hesitate, then, to put the greatest and best representatives of our age and country on those walls that we may look at them and draw inspiration from them? See here: I have on my book-shelves Shakespeare and Dante, Tennyson, Longfellow, Browning, Goethe and Schiller, with others of greater or less note, ancient and modern; and I take some good out of them all. 'We're the heirs of all the ages!' Let us enjoy our inheritance freely."

"By all means," I returned, smiling at his animation, for he talked with his hands as well as his tongue, and seemed to have a lively interest in every subject discussed.

We now descended the steep, dark stone stairs to the vaults, preceded by the gardener with a torch and a bundle of keys. They were dark dungeons of vast extent, and the man held up the light to show the traditional trap-door where the victims of the tyrant's vengeance were dropped down to be mangled or spiked below. And then he led us to a corner, and removing a large flat stone, held the torch over an aperture in the earth, and requested me to look down. It was a deep hole heaped with human bones.

"Oh, those were glorious times! the good old times!" said my host, continuing the subject of our previous conversation. "No wonder you English travellers love to dwell on them and study them; and lament the picturesqueness, the romance, which are gone, never to return. There is no inspiring theme for poet or painter now-a-days. What are modern men, who sacrificed everything for the emancipation of their country, who were tender of human life, who respected their promises, compared with those glorious old tyrants with so many real skeletons in their cupboards?"

"But see what marvellously gifted men flourished in those evil days," I said.

"And how were those gifted men treated? Would the Florence of

to-day exile a Dante? Would modern Italy allow her Michael Angelo to be the slave of a succession of old popes? Would she permit a petty prince to shut up Tasso in a madhouse for seven years? Believe me, we have all that was good of the past in the immortal works of the men of genius, who were unappreciated by their age," returned my host.

We were now ascending to the tower, and at length reached the top, a large square terrace walled all round breast high, with loop-holes. It commanded a magnificent view of a most pleasing landscape.

"What a contrast to the vaults!" I exclaimed.

In descending the narrow, steep stairs, we passed two rooms, one above the other, and entered the last, where some straw was stored. It was a square the full size of the tower, but had a closet off it which covered the landing below; the thick walls and deep windows made a delightful coolness and shade. A thought struck me.

"Signore, do you make no use of this room?"

"None but what you see."

"Will you let it to me, and I will furnish it in some manner for myself?"

"My dear sir, I should be most happy to have you for a tenant, but it is not habitable!"

"Never mind! I can live in any place, so it be clean. And this is a good room, a delightful, charming room."

The traditional Italian would have raised the rent on me, seeing my enthusiasm for the article which he thought worthless, but Julius Cæsar let me have it for what would be popularly described as "an old song."

I got a contadina to wash out my tower; I hunted up odds and ends of furniture; a stretcher bed with a mattress of Indian corn-leaves was supplied by my host, who would have added a wool mattress had I not firmly refused to use it, and linen, of which he had a great store, like all the Tuscan householders. I returned to town, put my trunk, bag and box of books on the diligence for San Severino, and then went to meet my new landlord, who drove me to the villa in his little trap, taking an hour less than the diligence.

A long country drive tête-a-tête is conducive to intimacy between two young men, and Giuliocesare and I were mutually pleased with each other. He invited me to dine with him the first evening, and when we had smoked a cigar walking up and down the avenue, we passed into the salon. In the far end of this baronial apartment the young avvocato had modestly established himself and his immediate belongings. To light up the whole length of the hall would have been too expensive, so one end was in dusky twilight while the other had two lamps, one on the writing-table and the other on a handsome ebony cabinet. This end wall had three book-cases and there was a table under the middle one covered with books. I took up a volume

off the writing-table and found it to be Emerson's "Representative Men," opened at the essay on Shakespeare. We plunged into literature at once, and I learned that Rosignoli was studying Shakespeare, and was glad of a little help in understanding some difficult passages.

"How do you find so much time for reading when you have so many other occupations?" I asked, for I knew he worked hard at his profession, and equally so on the farm. The moment he unyoked his horse he took of his good clothes and donned a suit of coarse white linen and a straw hat, and put a hand to everything, like the contadini. But whether feeding cattle, or tending or watering his vineyard, or chopping wood, there was something in his refined, intelligent face, in the bearing of his well-knit sinewy figure, that bespoke the gentleman.

"How do I find time? I will tell you; by never losing an hour unnecessarily. I rise at five o'clock, and that enables me to get some hours more out of my day than those who sleep late. Those who go into society must keep late hours and sleep in the morning; consequently, I abandon society, and only cultivate a few intimate friends. Thus I have my evenings for myself. I keep my heavy reading in town, but while leading a pastoral life I recreate my soul with poetry."

He saw I was interested, and with an engaging frankness he continued.

"I am obliged to work, not having been born to a fortune. I had a sad youth with many trials. Among those I count the worst was the loss of my parents at an early age. My father bought this farm for me with a legacy that had been left him, but he did not make it pay because he was ignorant of agriculture; but I make it pay now. The house is divided into different quarters and let to poor families, for the most part; some of them work for me, and some have other occupations; but they are all decent, clean, honest folk, and attached to me. I supply them with pure water, cheap wine and vegetables, and they are very punctual in the payment of the rents. I like work for its own sake, and I am happy and content with my humble lot, never envying the owners of the princely villas around me. If I did not look after everything myself, and left all to a steward, as the gentlemen do, I should soon have nothing."

Signor Rosignoli escorted me upstairs to my lodging in the tower, carrying a lucerna to light me, and bade me a kindly good-night on the threshold. He had told me that I might, if I liked, make an arrangement to dine with him; but I, knowing how Italians prize the privacy of their home, did not accept this sacrifice. I decided to take my meals at the little restaurant and supplement them with tea and biscuits, which I was careful to bring with me; and I had fresh milk on the premises. My host was most kind and courteous, but we saw little of each other in the daytime. Generally, when I was returning from my dinner about seven o'clock, I met him

outside the house somewhere, smoking, and we took a walk, returning to finish the evening together in the salon, reading and expounding our respective languages to each other; and sometimes I went straight up to my room.

I was as happy as a prince in my tower. From my windows I surveyed the lovely landscape, the gently undulating hills and vales, covered with fine olives, chestnuts, vineyards, ripe corn, dotted with scarlet poppies, the deep blue sky, the crimson sunset and golden sunrise. I liked the San Severini, too; they were good, honest people, and religious. I often looked into the church, which was at our gate, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, when service was going on, and I always found a devout congregation of simple peasants taking a genuine interest in the devotions. I attended on Sunday with my friend and found a large sprinkling of well-dressed persons from the villas around. Among these I observed the fair ladies of the diligence; and Giulio stayed to speak with them outside the church.

III.

A FEW days after my arrival in San Severino I was writing till after sunset, and though it was still bright out-of-doors the twilight invaded my chamber because of the smallness of the windows and the depth of the walls. It was hardly worth while to take my papers up to the terrace, where there was a stone table and bench; so I stood at the window making a desk of the broad sill, to finish a chapter. A page which I had pushed hastily from me fluttered out through the window; and it was easier to re-write it than descend those break-neck stairs to seek it. When I had finished my work for the day, I went up to the roof, where I often took the air before going to bed. I was walking up and down, watching a procession of Misericordia Brothers issuing forth from the church at the end of the avenue, with their flaming torches, when my host appeared.

"Amico," he said in his easy Italian fashion—he had begun to call me amico in three days—"are you not dreadfully lonely up here in this hermitage, like St. Simeon on the top of a tower?"

"No," I replied. "I have a few favourite authors with me, and I am absorbed in a little work that I am writing con amore, the subject being very simpatico. I don't know any English word that exactly corresponds with *simpatico*—do you?"

"Ah," he said, ignoring my question, "and you would not trust a friend with the secret? Well, I have accidentally discovered it. Listen!"

And he drew from his pocket the sheet that had flown out of the window, and read it aloud from beginning to end.

"Enough, enough!" I cried, laughing. "You have found me out—a Liberal in disguise. Do not inform on me, pray."

"Impostor!" said Giuliocesare. "What was your motive for deceiving me?"

"Motive? Why, I hardly know, unless it was to rouse your enthusiasm; diversity of opinion gives a certain vivacity to conversation. I suppose you have come to give me notice to quit?"

The Italian of fiction would be bound to say, "Brother of my soul, welcome to my home and my heart." But this real Italian said nothing at all. We looked at each other with a smile and shook hands, and there was a tacit promise of friendship in that silent hand-clasp.

After this our intercourse was more free, and we dropped the Signore, calling each other by our baptismal names, Italian fashion.

The San Severini celebrated the fête of their patron saints of that name with great honours. Clergy had come from a distance to assist at the functions; special preparations had been made by the choir, and the church was draped inside and out with crimson and gold cloth. The owners of the villas had sent handsome offerings of flowers, and so also had Giuliocesare, who paid every respect to the forms of religion while in the country, not to "disedify the population, or make a scandal." In the city he permitted himself more liberty; and laughed with me over the pretensions of San Severino.

On the day of the fête I was in the church leaning against a pillar, watching the moving crowd. The people were squeezing themselves into every nook and corner, standing and sitting on the steps of the side altars; and I became aware of a fair presence in a confession-box near me by the constant waving of an ivory fan. I soon perceived that the owner of the fan was the lady of the diligence, the Signora Madalena Buontalento; and standing beside her with her eyes bent on her prayer-book was her young cousin, Minerva Nerucci. I observed that Giulio often turned his eyes in the direction of the confession-box, and I was not surprised to find him talking to the ladies outside the church door when I came forth with the crowd.

The Signora Buontalento was very friendly to me, and said: "Won't you come over to the villa with your friend?"

"With the greatest pleasure, signora."

"I told Signor Giulio to bring you *sans ceremonie*, but he said you shunned society and lived as a hermit. How do you support the dulness of San Severino?"

"I think it charming, madame."

"Where is my Luisina?" asked the avvocato.

"She was very naughty, and I left her at home," returned mamma, smiling.

"Little darling!" said the young man. "I like her best when she is naughty."

"You would not if you had to manage her. Ask Minerva if she finds it easy to teach her or keep her in order."

We saw the ladies to their carriage, promising to walk over in the evening to their villa.

"Is the Signora Buontalento long a widow?" I inquired.

"More than two years. She was married fresh out of a convent at seventeen to a rich elderly merchant, who left her the angeletto you have seen. Her hand has been sought by several suitors."

"I am not surprised; she is pretty, good-natured, young, and, I suppose, rich."

"Yes; do you admire her?" asked my friend.

"Not particularly; I like her companion better," I replied, "though she is not so handsome."

"She has *very* little dot; in fact, is in rather a dependent position."

"That does not make her society less agreeable."

"No, that is true; but——"

Giulio paused.

"But what, my friend?"

"You will not take ill what I am going to say—what I have no right to say?" asked the avvocato.

"No, no; out with it."

"You are a foreigner, and our customs are somewhat different from yours. In England a certain amount of intimacy is permitted between young people, but here it is not considered *convenable* to show a decided preference for a girl unless with serious intentions."

"You have warned me in time," I said laughing. "I know your customs and had no mind to transgress them."

"Now you are a little angry—non è vero?" he said with an apologetic smile, and a winning gentleness of manner which would have disarmed me even if I had been angry, which I was not.

"Che, che!" and I put my arm through his, as we walked up and down the shady court smoking. "How delightful it is here after the hot, crowded church! It was what Madame would call a *murderous* heat."

We passed a pleasant evening at the villa of the ladies, for the most part out-of-doors. Another visitor dropped in; a country gentleman of about thirty-five years, large, powerful, handsome; whose conversation was chiefly about horses, dogs, and villas to let. He seemed to be paying court to the widow, and I attributed to jealousy a certain polite antagonism towards my friend.

That such an intelligent, charming fellow as Giulio could fall in love with such an empty, common-place person did not surprise me, as I see those incongruities too often to wonder at them much. Her florid beauty, her genial, happy temperament had no doubt attracted him; and probably the lady's fortune was not without its influence on the prudent young avvocato.

"I am as fond of that child as if she were mine," he said with reference to the little Luisina.

"Perhaps she will be yours some day," I thought. And I said: "I hope the child will get a good step-father, who will treat her kindly."

"I hope so; he would be a brute else. She is more beautiful than Leonardo da Vinci's angels."

On the following night there was to be a display of fireworks—still in honour of San Severino—and the ladies had been persuaded to promise to come with Signor Rossi, the gentleman already mentioned, to witness them from the top of the tower. Another neighbour, and his wife and daughter, were also invited to be of the party.

When the fireworks began to play, Signor Rossi offered to lift the child in his arms to see all that was going on; but she, with the caprice of a spoiled beauty, turned away, saying:

"No, not you; Signor Giulio," and held up her arms to him. The young man caught her up and kissed her, carrying her away to the side of the terrace where I was standing with the Signorina Minerva.

"You should not say rude things, Luisina. It was not kind to tell Signor Rossi that you would not let him lift you," said Minerva.

"Forgive her, Signorina mia; frankness is the privilege of her age; she will learn to dissemble her true sentiments time enough," said the avvocato.

"Do you not think it possible to be polite and true at the same time?" asked the girl.

"Quite so; but it requires a special education as well as natural tact to adjust the claims of truth and politeness impartially. Our dear Luisina is not yet up to the mark."

"I am up to the mark on the garden door," said Luisina complacently, in her lisping accents. We all laughed; Minerva's was a low, sweet, subdued laugh, very pleasant to hear, and more so because of its rarity. Giulio turned away, set the child down, and began a game of romps with her round the table and seats. I thought I observed by the blaze of the fireworks a confirmation of a suspicion I had entertained since I had seen Minerva in church and at the villa, that—

> Her eyes on all his motions
> With a mute observance hung.

I did not wonder that the girl was attracted by him. I found him charming, and could imagine him to be an irresistible lover. But whose lover was he? I fancied that of the Signora Madalena.

When we were about to descend the steep stairs of the tower, Giulio asked Rossi to carry the child; but that gentleman replied stiffly that she did not wish to be carried by him; whereupon the avvocato gave me the light and took the little one himself. We had some slight refreshments in the salon downstairs before the guests departed, but Signor Rossi tasted nothing, and talked little.

Two days after the fireworks, I was alone in my room, when my host appeared at the hour of the afternoon when he usually reposed.

"I thought you were asleep," I said, pushing a chair towards him. "What is the news?" He looked pale, and his eyes were very bright.

"Gerard, I want you to do me a little service."

"Willingly; tell me how?"

"I have arranged a 'partito d' onore' for to-morrow. The doctor will be my first sponsor, but I must have a second."

"'Partito d' onore?' You are not serious?"

"I am perfectly serious," he replied.

"Do you mean to say, Giulio, that you are really going to fight, or that you will go through the comedy of firing a shot over your adversary's shoulder, or giving him a slight scratch with a sword?"

"We mean real business, my friend. It is agreed that the combat is only to cease when one or the other is beyond the possibility of continuing it."

"And you invite me to assist at this as if it were a pic-nic! Is it allowable to ask the cause of the desperate resolve to slay or be slain?"

"Surely: Signor Rossi insulted me to-day in presence of the doctor and two other persons. A letter of his was sent from the post-office by mistake with mine. The names *Rossi* and *Rosignoli* are not very similar, but still such mistakes often occur. It happened that the said letter was imperfectly gummed, if at all, and he accuses me of having opened it. You see such an insult is insupportable. There is but one way of avenging it."

"You require the man's blood?"

"We must fight. I don't care whose blood is shed! It may be mine."

"If he retracted and apologised, you would be satisfied. Is it not so?"

"He would not do it. He has sought a pretext for a quarrel."

"Why?" I asked.

Giulio hesitated. "I may tell you in confidence that I believe he is a pretender to the hand of the Signora Madalena, and he thinks I am; but he is mistaken."

"I thought so myself," I said, much surprised by this confession. "But if it be all a mistake, it will be the more easy to accommodate the quarrel."

"Do you suppose I would explain such a matter unasked?" he said. "Never!"

"You would rather die—or else have a man's blood on your conscience all your life? To send a fellow creature out of the world, his soul full of evil passions, is too serious a deed to decide on hastily. Reflect, my friend. Late remorse cannot recall the dead: and as your wise d' Azeglio says somewhere: 'The reproaches of the dead are hard to bear.' You have not the strong temptation that he

has, for you are not jealous. It will count as an extenuating circumstance in his favour, and it will weigh against you at the bar of eternal justice."

"You will not be my second, then?"

"Frankly, Giulio, I will not, for I think duelling a brutal and barbarous practice, worthy of the past ages which you so much despise."

"I may as well confess, Gerard, that I agree with you in everything that you have said," returned Giulio.

"Allora!" I cried, seizing his hands and looking into his face.

"I must fight," he replied, with a melancholy resolve. "I am sorry for the absurd prejudice—a relic of barbarism, which still prevails in our beloved Italy. But I must yield to it, else there would be a slur on my honour; both men and women would despise me. I am sorry; for life had begun to open with happy promises for the future."

His voice took a tone of tender sadness, and a softer light came into his eyes.

"If there is someone in the world who is still dear to you, who is worthy of your affection—Giulio, my friend, let the thought of that person stand between you and crime—or death!"

He shook his head sadly, hopelessly.

"You are a coward!" I cried, letting go his hands and turning away.

"How?"

"Yes! I have called you a coward, and I will give you no satisfaction. You cannot dare to face the sneers of the thoughtless, vulgar herd, the idle, worthless, ignorant men of the clubs and cafés; but you dare to commit a crime which your conscience loudly condemns. Go! You are a coward, I say."

I turned away and walked to the window, and immediately I heard the door shut. He was gone.

Giulio was the most lovable man I had ever known. I had become much attached to him, and I was deeply grieved and disturbed. I pondered on various schemes of frustrating the meeting, and at last thought of appealing to the Signora Madalena Buontalento, which seemed the only chance. It was surely her business to prevent two men killing each other because of her.

I took my hat and set forth at once. When I reached the villa I asked to see the mistress of the house, who received me with her usual cordial, gracious manner. The Signorina was in the room, and I asked for a moment's private conversation on urgent business. Minerva rose at once, but the Signora laid her hand on hers and hindered her, saying to me: "You may speak, Signore. I have no secrets from my cousin."

"There is no reason why I should conceal it from the Signorina," I replied. "It has come to my knowledge that there is going to be a duel between the Signor Giuliocesare and Signor Rossi. This

'partito d' onore,' as they call it, is arranged for to-morrow morning; and it seems it is to be a serious affair—not a diversion."

The bright colour faded from the lady's face. I looked at the young girl who was sitting with her work in her lap and her pretty hands folded on it. She, too, had grown pale, and her brown eyes were fixed on me with a startled expression.

"You see, Signora, I can do nothing: I am a stranger and a man, and no one would listen to me. But ladies have a powerful influence if they choose to use it; and I dared to hope—as both these gentlemen are your friends—that you would be so good as to interfere. You will know how better than I should."

"Do you know the cause of the quarrel?" asked the lady, with a troubled look.

"The ostensible cause, yes; Signor Rossi says that Signor Rosignoli opened a letter of his."

"What a shame!" cried Minerva, blushing to the brow.

The Signora remained silent and thoughtful, leaning her cheek on her plump white hand sparkling with jewels, her large blue eyes full of trouble.

"Pray advise me what to do," she said at length. "I am so taken by surprise that the little wits I have are confused."

"The offender is Signor Rossi, and he is also the elder; suppose you summon him to your presence and remonstrate with him."

She agreed to do this, and went at once to write a note to be sent to the gentleman's house. The young lady glanced at me once or twice, and at last said: "Cannot *you* do something to prevent this meeting, Signore?"

"Signorina, tell me what: I shall be only too happy to obey your commands," I replied.

"You are Signor Giulio's friend."

"Yes, I love him well, and I have already pushed my remonstrances to the point of breaking our friendship."

"He is so bent on fighting?"

"He says he must; that both men and women would despise him if he did not."

She sighed audibly, took up her work and plied the needle with trembling fingers. I had nothing to say to soothe the distress which she was unwilling that I should see; so the moment the Signora returned I took my leave.

As I was coming home from a walk in the evening I found a young man, a notary of San Severino, standing at the foot of my stairs, just outside the salon of the Signor Giulio. He accosted me and asked me if I had any objection to witness a will.

"Whose will?" I asked.

"Signor Rosignoli's. Four male witnesses are necessary, and we want one."

I followed him, and walked up the long, gloomy hall. At the far

end of it, seated at his writing-table with his steward and another man standing near, was the young master of the house. Letters were burning in the grate, and there was a general air of confusion around. When he saw me emerging into the light of his solitary lamp, he rose with the politeness that never failed, and said: "Signor Gerard, I did not mean them to trouble you; but since you are here, perhaps you will not object to witness my will?"

I said I had no objection. The notary then read the testament aloud. With the exception of some trifling personal belongings and a few books left to persons named, the Signorina Minerva Nerucci was to inherit all his property. The testator put his signature to the document and handed the pen to me. I signed; the others did likewise; and wishing the padrone felice notte—which must have sounded a hollow mockery to him—they departed.

I was following the steward out of the room, but I turned to take another look at Giulio. There was something indescribably pathetic in the figure of the lonely young man standing there, making preparations for his own death and funeral while in the full vigour of health, with a happy life before him. I saw in his eye a mournful look that went to my heart. I walked back to him and said:

"Giulio, I beg your pardon for my rudeness this afternoon. If I loved you less, I should have been more polite." And I offered my hand.

"I know you are sorry for me, Gerard," he said, pressing my hand warmly. "I am sorry for myself. Life was becoming pleasant to me, for I was content with my lot, and I had become attached to my humble home here." He looked round at his heroes on the walls. "I was happy in the thought that it would soon be made bright by the presence of my beloved. My will has revealed my secret to you. I love Minerva, and I am going to be killed for Madalena!"

"That is hard indeed," I replied. "To die for one's love has a sort of consolation in it; but to die for another! And will it not look like disloyalty to her?"

"I have never spoken; but I leave a sealed letter, which will reveal the truth to her when I am gone—*if I should fall;* and of that there is little doubt, for *I* will not kill my adversary."

"Giulio, is there no way out of it?"

"If you were Italian, you would know there is none. Addio! But, stay, Gerard: I want you to have a little recordo of me." He took an antique seal off his chain and gave it me; and then, laying his two hands on my shoulders with a winning grace and tenderness, which would have softened a harder heart than mine, he said: "Amico mio! you will not forget me?"

"No, Giulio, no!" I replied, with emotion. "May God preserve and bless you!" I clasped the warm, living hand, and thought the morrow's sun might find it cold and pulseless. "If this is likely to be our last meeting on earth, may I not stay a little to bear you company?"

"I have to set my house in order," he said. "Thanks, dear friend, but you must leave me."

I was up at the dawn, watching for Giulio from my tower, and I followed him at a little distance to the village. He stopped at the doctor's house, and soon came forth with him and another man. They took the road to the Villa Buontalento, and within half-a-mile of it they turned into the wood. I now guessed that the meeting was to be in the glade by a little brook, because it was a very retired spot, with a sufficiently open space for the contest.

I did not follow them, but ran to the villa and asked to see the ladies. Minerva came down first, in a cream-coloured morning wrapper, fastened with a crimson bow at the neck. She looked as if she had not slept, and asked eagerly what news I had.

"They are gone to the ground. Has Madame failed?"

"The messenger left the note, for Rossi was not at home. He has not called, and I fear he is bent on carrying out his ends."

"Call Madame, and come both of you to the ground."

Madalena soon appeared, and Minerva, taking a garden hat from a peg in the hall, stepped out on the lawn, holding up her long gown from the dewy grass, which soon wet her little bronze slippers.

It is curious how well I remember noticing those trivial things, notwithstanding the state of excitement I was in. Instead of waiting for the pony carriage, we rushed across the grounds, taking a short cut to the brook. As we approached the glade we beheld through the trees a group of men looking on at the contest, which had already begun. The antagonists were parrying, advancing, retreating, with rapid motions which the eye could not follow at a distance.

We quickened our pace, the ladies gasping with nervous excitement.

"You must call on them to stop, and rush in between them, Signora," I said.

"Must I? Oh, Madonna Santissima, aid me!" cried the poor lady, and she ran forward, followed by her cousin.

"Hold, gentlemen! Hold, for the love of Heaven!" she cried, at the moment when Rossi sheathed the point of his blade in Giulio's breast, and drew it forth stained with a crimson dye. He stood upright a moment, and turned his eyes on Madalena, as she threw up her arms and screamed, "Mio Dio!" and then on Minerva, who stood still, an image of stony despair. As he was sinking to the ground, I caught him in my arms and laid him gently down, resting his head on my knee. The surgeon cut open his clothes from neck to shoulder and applied his medicaments to staunch the blood, which flowed profusely from a deep, slanting cut in the chest. Before he had finished, Giulio's already pallid face had become a death-like white, and his eyelids closed.

"Is he dead?" asked someone, in a tone of deep anxiety and distress. It was his rival, whose hand had dealt the blow.

"Dead!" echoed Madalena, in an hysterical voice. "Is it you who ask? And have you the courage to stand there and look at your handiwork? Away, assassin!" She waved her hand and turned from him with a look of horror. He cowed beneath the lovely woman's scorn, and moved back a pace or two behind the seconds.

At the fatal word "*Morto*," Minerva sank on her knees beside me with a heart-broken sob. For the first time she dared to speak her lover's name. Laying her hand on his, she cried "Giulio!" in a tone of such anguish that it helped to recall his consciousness. He opened his eyes and the first word he breathed was "Minerva!" accompanied by a look of inexpressible love and sorrow mingled. She answered but with her tears, which fell like rain upon his hand.

"Where is Rossi?" asked the wounded man, and Rossi hastened to his side. Giulio, still holding Minerva's hand clasped in his left, extended his right to his adversary.

"It was all a mistake," he said, with a faint, pale smile.

"I wish to heaven you had said so yesterday," replied Rossi, remorsefully.

"True, most true. Ah, Gerard, my friend, you were right; I was a coward, a miserable coward. If I die I have my deserts." This elicited a fresh burst of grief from Minerva. "Do not weep, dearest; I am not worth those precious tears of thine. I do not want to die; I would fain live for thee, my angel!"

"You are not going to die—not a bit of it," said the doctor, in a cheerful, business-like manner. "It is a bad wound, but I judge it curable within twenty days. Come, gentlemen; we must make a litter of this mantle, and bring him to the villa as quickly as possible."

Rossi was one of the persons who carried the patient to the house, where he was laid in the guest chamber and tended with the greatest care. The doctor was right. Giulio did not die. Having conducted themselves, as the seconds declared, like "perfect cavaliers," according to the code, there was nothing to hinder Giulio and Rossi being very good friends henceforth. But the Signora Madalena could hardly forgive her admirer for the part he played in what was very near being a fatal tragedy. It is just possible that she felt a warmer interest in Giulio than in Rossi; but in time her heart may soften to her faithful knight, whose fault was caused by love of her.

After having assisted at the making of Giulio's will, and such like lugubrious preparations for his death, I had the pleasure of witnessing the happy ceremony of his marriage with the Signorina Minerva Nerucci, he having voluntarily given her a solemn pledge that he would never fight a duel again before he asked that other promise from her which was to make them one.

G. S. Godkin.

MY FRIEND'S WIFE.

By C. Haddon Chambers.

I WISH, before relating this story, to anticipate the natural inquiries which I imagine will follow the reader's perusal of it. Thus: 1. Is the story true? Yes, I believe it is, as it was told to me by a friend whose word I have every reason to respect and believe, and who was, himself, one of the *dramatis personæ* of the short history. 2. Do I believe in spiritualism? No; for the simple reason that I know nothing whatever about it, never having had, I must confess, either the energy or the curiosity to devote myself to a proper study of the subject. I was never at a *séance* in my life, and no spirits or invisible beings have ever rapped mysterious messages to me in my solitude. So now to my story; or to be accurate and just, to the story of my friend, Mr. Wainton.

We had, through tortuous conversational windings, got on to the subject of spiritualism one evening, when my friend signified that apropos to that subject he had a tale to unfold. Accordingly I made myself comfortable in an easy chair, lighted a fresh cigar, and remained expectantly silent while he began the following.

You must know that when I had fairly entered my twenties, spiritualism, as it is called, was the talk of the day, and spirit-rapping was, with a great many people, the favourite amusement of the hour. I, being of an inquisitive and somewhat superstitious disposition, was bitten by the general craze, and very badly bitten I assure you. I neglected all other amusements for the peculiarly exciting one of spirit-rapping, and as in my small circle of friends there were several who shared my enthusiasm, I had every opportunity of gratifying the singular taste.

Among those friends it is only necessary for me to mention three —George Hargraves, his wife Grace, and her sister, Janet Carr. George was then my most intimate friend, as he would probably have remained to this day but that the decrees of fate took him to India to reside several years since, and few friendships can bear the test of such a wide and lengthy separation. Prolonged pen-and-ink intimacies are rare, as you have doubtless experienced; and as my active friendship with George is now a matter purely of retrospect, I am justified in speaking of it and him in the past tense.

No three people could have been more unlike than those I have named. Hargraves was somewhat indolent and slightly superstitious, but of rather a sluggish intellect, and not of very refined sensibilities. Although unconsciously regardless of the feelings of others, however, he was frank and generous, and he was possessed of a strong vein of

humour. He cultivated the spirits, to use his own irreverent expression, 'for the fun of the thing.'

Miss Carr, my friend's sister-in-law, was a little, thin woman, rather pretty, with bright, restless eyes, and sharp features—not excepting that unseen but important member, the tongue. She was deeply read for a young woman, and decidedly clever; and to tell the truth, I was a little afraid of her, as one is apt to be of clever women. She regularly joined in our communings with the spirit-world in a business-like manner, and with what a contemporary statesman would call an 'open and inquiring mind.' She professed to be an earnest seeker after truth: particularly, I could not help suspecting, the truth about other people.

Mrs. Hargraves was so unlike her sister in every respect, as to almost incline one to doubt the relationship. In person she was taller and much more beautiful. Her features were very delicately moulded; her hair was of that light brown shade which is almost golden in the sunlight; her complexion was clear to transparency; her form was very frail, and her eyes, which I purposely mention last because I remember them best, were large and grey and heavily fringed with dark lashes. The eyelids had a way of drooping suddenly, in a manner which told eloquently of an exceedingly timid and retiring nature. You looked at Grace Hargraves and thought of a water-lily.

For the rest she was the most highly-strung woman I have ever met. In her, sensibility had life and motion. Her nervousness was almost painful, until you knew her well and had gained her confidence. Then you found her to be a very charming woman, of a strangely poetic imagination. For my part, I very much preferred Grace—as I, being an intimate friend, was privileged to call her—to her clever sister.

Hargraves, as you will readily imagine from what I have told you, did not quite understand his wife, although he was undoubtedly devotedly attached to her. The comparative coarseness of his nature did not fit in very well with the exquisite refinement of hers; but she gave no sign that it was so, and I believe that their married life was altogether happy.

It is scarcely necessary for me to tell you that Grace took no active part in our favourite pastime. She had not her sister's inquisitiveness. And I think, too, that, holding as she did very orthodox views, she regarded the whole business as savouring of impiety; more especially as our devotions—if I may so call them for want of a better word—were attended with more amusement than solemnity. But apart altogether from these considerations, her nerves were really much too delicately strung to admit of so severe a strain.

Accordingly, when the lights were turned down, and we who courted the spirit revelations gathered round the table, Grace always retired into the next room—which communicated with the one we

occupied by folding doors—and passed the time with a book, or more generally at the piano. She played very beautifully. She loved music. Her talent had been highly cultivated, and coupled with these advantages she had the most marvellous gift of expression I have ever met with in a non-professional woman. The intense feeling of which she was made up seemed to pass from her finger tips and endue the instrument with a noble, poetic life.

Naturally enough, we liked Grace to play during our *séances*. It added a fresh charm to the mystic hour, and she was always willing to indulge us. While we communed with the spirits, the old masters' most dreamy and suggestive compositions were eloquently interpreted within our hearing; but not infrequently the horrible incongruity occurred of one of Beethoven's sonatas, or one of Mendelssohn's songs without words, being drowned in the laughter occasioned by an unexpected sentiment on the part of some lively spirit.

One evening—a memorable evening—our party at the table consisted of five, including Hargraves, Miss Carr and myself. The spirits were in a phenomenally merry mood. Absurd joke after joke was perpetrated against each member of the party, and our laughter at last became so loud and frequent that Grace suddenly closed the piano, and declared from the next room that she would sacrifice music and herself on the altar of good nature no longer.

"Then come and join us, my dear," cried Hargraves, who was in the highest spirits.

"No, thank you," we heard her reply.

"Well, just come to the door for one moment," implored her husband. "I want to speak to you."

She appeared at the door immediately, and stood looking into the dim-lighted room.

"What is it, George?"

"Do join us, Grace—only for a little while; and if you don't like it you can leave us again."

"Please don't ask me," replied Grace, evidently troubled that she felt obliged to refuse a request from her husband.

"You have no idea what you are missing, Mrs. Hargraves," remarked an enthusiastic lady next to me.

"I don't wish for an idea," was the reply.

"Indeed, Grace, it is very foolish of you to isolate yourself," said her sister. "You not only lose considerable entertainment, but much profitable instruction. What is life without the pleasures and profits of investigation?"

"I don't envy you either the pleasure or the profit, Janet, and you should know by this time that I am not equal to a share in what you call investigation."

"I shouldn't urge her, George," I whispered to my friend; "I really don't think her nerves are equal to it. Remember the widow

who fainted the other night when the presence of her late husband's shade was announced."

"Nonsense!" replied George, among whose small faults obstinacy was conspicuous. "People are nervous because they nurse and coddle their nerves; and, thank heaven, Grace has no defunct husband to fear a visitation from. The only way to dispel her nervousness is to show her how harmless the whole thing is. Grace, do come. The spirits are jovial to-night, and you will be amused."

Then, as she hesitated painfully—her love and obliging, compliant nature at war with her prejudices and fears—he added: "Only this once, dear, to please me."

Then she came, as I feared she would if he pressed the point; and feeling more vexation than I quite understood, I made room for her between Janet and myself. As she laid her hand upon the table, I was conscious that she trembled, and I was sorely tempted to make some excuse for breaking up the meeting. Would I had done so!

"That's very good of you," said Hargraves, pleased to have secured his own way, "and in a few minutes you will be glad you have come, and sorry you have stayed away so long. Now understand, I am asking the questions in French—a language we all know pretty well—and I obtain answers in the same language by repeating aloud the alphabet, a rap being heard when I come to a letter required in the composition of the spirit's answer. Now, let us proceed."

Then, after a pause, he put this question to our invisible companions: "Have you any particular communication to make?"

The answer to Hargraves' question came promptly in three raps, which signified an affirmative.

"Is the communication you desire to make to be addressed to one of us particularly?"

The answer was again yes; and while the lady on my left tittered audibly in anticipation of another jest, I felt that Grace, who was on my right, trembled more violently than before.

"Will you please intimate to which of us you refer?"

The answer this time was strangely expressed, but in a manner we were all familiar with. The table on which our hands rested, and which was small, and oval in shape, slowly tipped up, and one end of it, at which Grace was seated, declined almost into her lap.

I had, strangely enough, confidently expected this result; but I was none the less annoyed when it came. I believe we all expected that Grace would start up in agitation and leave the room; but she did not. She sat still and silent, without even withdrawing her hands from the table. I tried to see her face, but it was impossible to read its expression in the darkness. I felt sure, though, that she was colourless.

"We needn't go any further, George," I said. "I'm sure Grace can't stand it."

"Oh, do let's go on," cried the lady on my left; "it's sure to be something funny."—And thereupon I hated her.

"Go on," said Grace, in a low voice.

I suppose that it is not in human nature to deliberately refuse hearing something about oneself, and so, for the moment, Grace's curiosity conquered her nervousness.

Then George proceeded to elicit the communication by the means I have described. These were the letters at which the rap arrested him—

LA MORT.

The effect upon me, when the T completed the words, I shall never forget. It fell like an iron bolt upon my heart. Those fateful words to be directed against the youngest and fairest of our party! It was too horrible. I was by no means a "true believer," but I defy anyone, under the circumstances, not to have felt impressed as I did.

For many moments we all sat chilled into silence, and then Hargraves burst into a laugh—not a natural laugh, but a discordant, affected one.

"What a very bad joke," he said, with a sorry attempt to speak lightly; "and what an old one. Pity they couldn't tell us something we didn't know before. Of course we shall all die some day. They insist upon that, because they've experienced the sensation themselves, I suppose."

Then, to my intense surprise, Grace said, with apparent calmness: "Ask them when, George."

I have often asked myself since, whether my friend was right in continuing that scene, and, the answer being no, I have condemned myself for not insisting upon closing it. But Hargraves probably argued, as I did, that opposing Grace's wishes would only result in leaving a deeper impression upon her mind; and we were, doubtless, both animated by the thought that the prophecy was in keeping with the lively view of humour in which the spirits had comported themselves during the evening.

George obeyed his wife, seeking the required information in tones of assumed levity and indifference. By the method he employed, some time was occupied in eliciting a reply, during which the tension upon the feelings of each of us—judging by myself—must have been painfully intense.

"*Within one year!*" was the substance of the spirits' reply.

When this second blighting message was delivered, another silence fell upon us, which I hastened to break by forcing a laugh. George, awakened from the stupor into which he appeared to have fallen, followed my example. Janet said, "absurd," with contemptuous incredulity; and the lady I have before mentioned, like the foolish creature she was, maladroitly burst into tears, and left the room. Grace alone of us all remained silent, and outwardly unaffected.

"The spirits are too odious to be endured now," remarked Har-

graves, rising from the table. "I do believe, Grace, that they are trying to revenge themselves on you for having neglected them so long. Let us go to the next room, dear, and have some music."

It was only when I saw her in the light of the other room that I realised how deeply she had been affected. Her face was perfectly white, and her eyes, instead of drooping, as was their wont when met, looked straight at one with a strange, *unseeing* expression.

She sat at the piano, and resumed the piece she had been playing when our laughter had interrupted her. It was Beethoven's "Adieu," commonly supposed to be the great master's last composition. It is, as you are doubtless aware, a composition full of beauty and divine simplicity, but so intensely melancholy that I would rather she had played anything else just then. But, ah! how beautifully she played it. So softly, lingeringly and regretfully, that when the noble theme died slowly away upon the piano, it long left its mournful echo in my memory, and kept alive melancholy in my heart.

When she left the piano, I rose to go.

"Good-night, Grace; good-night, George. And, by-the-bye," I added in her hearing, "since the spirits have taken to making bad jokes, I think we had better cut their acquaintance."

"I quite agree with you," he replied.

Then, as he came with me to the hall door, I hinted my opinion that Grace needed change of air, and on that point he also agreed with me.

For several months after that night I saw nothing of the Hargraves'. George and his wife went to Scotland, where they had numerous relations, and shortly after their departure business suddenly called me to America, where I remained for nearly six months. During that uncertain period for both of us (George, I afterwards learned, was still moving about among his Northern relatives), it is not strange that no correspondence passed between us. I had by no means forgotten my friends, although the circumstances which attended our last meeting were dim in my memory. Altogether, ten months passed before we again met.

On the afternoon of the day on which I again found myself in London, I met Hargraves face to face as I was coming out of a bank in the City.

We were both delighted at the meeting. I told him that I had intended calling at his house in the evening in the hope that he had returned to town.

Then as we walked arm-in-arm westward I asked after Grace.

"I am sorry to say," he replied, "that Grace has been ailing for some time—quite three months."

Distressed to hear such bad news, I inquired the cause of her illness, noticing at the same time how worn and troubled my friend was looking.

"Her illness puzzles me," said Hargraves; "and no wonder, since

it puzzles all the doctors. She appears to be consumed with an inward fever, and her nervousness, which you will remember well, has so increased as to be now painful to witness. She has no appetite; nothing seems to interest or rouse her; and her weakness is such that she is at present unable to leave her room. The greatest physician in England saw her, and spoke of nervous depression. He recommended tonics and a change of air and scene; but as we had been moving about the country for months, the last piece of advice was valueless. You can judge of my anxiety."

I was silent. While he had been speaking, the recollection of that night ten months ago suddenly came to me with startling vividness.

"What to do next I don't know," pursued Hargraves. "I wish, if you are not engaged this afternoon, you would come home with me and see Grace. The sight of such an old friend might do her good."

I gladly assented, and he called a cab.

As we drove to his house I remarked:

"Do you think it possible that Grace may have something weighing upon her mind?"

He turned quickly as I spoke.

"Only to-day, for the first time, has such a thought entered my mind, and it has filled me with trouble. I had completely forgotten what occurred when we last met—when I was wicked, cruel, mad enough to urge her into joining in our spirit mummery. May God forgive me, though I can never forgive myself."

"I, too, had almost forgotten it," I said.

"But has she?" he exclaimed vehemently. "Has she? That is the question that is torturing me now. You know how terribly imaginative she is. I must find out by some means if that horrible prophecy is still in her mind, and if so, I must make a clean breast of it to the doctors."

Just then we arrived at the house. George led the way upstairs, and on the first landing we met Janet Carr.

"How is Grace?" asked George, impatiently, as we stopped to shake hands.

"I'm afraid she is no better," replied Janet, seriously. "I have been reading to her, but she did not seem able to settle her thoughts to listen.

At the door of the sick-room Hargraves by a gesture bade me wait for a moment. Then he entered alone.

"Grace, love," I heard him say, "I have brought an old friend with me. Are you well enough to see him?"

The reply was spoken too weakly for me to catch its sense; but in a few moments my friend stepped softly to the door and beckoned me within.

Grace was in bed, half sitting up by the support of a number of pillows, an Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders. I was inexpressibly shocked—prepared though I was—by the change in her

appearance. The flesh had fallen away from her face. Her paleness, which was as that of death, was only rendered more startling by the spot of vivid colour on either cheek. Her eyes, which were preternaturally bright, and inclined to wander, seemed to start from their deep, dark, hollow setting.

Directly I saw her I felt convinced that our suspicions of the cause of her illness were only too well founded; and by the strange look that crossed her face I became conscious, too, that the presence of me, of all people—connected as I was with that memorable evening—was the least likely to benefit her. Accordingly, I determined not to remain longer than a few moments.

"Grace, this won't do at all," I said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "This is not the reunion that I dreamed of in the months I spent across the Atlantic."

"I'm glad you've come back," she murmured faintly, stretching out a weak, thin hand.

"And now that I'm here," I continued, "I shall expect you, as a personal favour to me, to get well and strong again."

"Indeed, he deserves a jollier welcome than this, dear!" remarked Hargraves. "You may be sure that he will not be content until he sees you downstairs sitting at the piano as of old."

I left the bed, and was about to take George aside to whisper that I had better not stay, when we were arrested by a slight exclamation from Grace. Turning quickly, we saw that she had risen upon her elbow, and that, with her face towards the door, she was bending eagerly forward.

Hargraves hurried to her side.

"What is it, darling?" he asked, with tender anxiety.

She made no reply.

"Grace—dear love—what is it?"

"Listen!" she whispered.

We both listened, but heard nothing.

"What is it you hear, dear?" And, leaning against the bed, he wound his arm round her.

"'The Adieu,'" she murmured. "Beethoven's 'Adieu.' You remember? Listen!"

George threw a look of intense anguish at me, as we again bent our heads to listen. He heard nothing—but this time I did. I distinctly heard the melancholy strains of "L'Adieu," as if the music were being played softly and tenderly on the piano, as if Grace herself had played it.

I say I heard distinctly; but actual music there was none. It was the intensity of the *seeming* to hear that made me hear. The music was made audible to me by the force of a highly-wrought imagination—the same force which brought Grace Hargraves her death.

For when I looked up she was lying back in her husband's arms—and life had fled.

THE BLACK VALLEY.

By William Francis Ainsworth, F.S.A.

IT has been my fate to be a good deal knocked about in the world. I have been cast upon boundless steppes and apparently limitless wildernesses and deserts, but none of them have left such an impression upon me of utter repulsiveness as the "Black Valley."

In the first, the sense of loneliness and monotony has been relieved by the green carpeting of the soil; in the second, a few shrubs and other scattered vegetation have helped to cheer the otherwise parched and sandy expanse.

But in the "Black Valley" there was no vegetation whatsoever. I was travelling at the time on a sorry steed, accompanied by a young and faithful servant—a Mussulman, Abd-allah by name—as he was in reality a true servant of God; and by a native muleteer who had charge of an additional horse, carrying saddle-bags of portentous dimensions.

We were crossing a rugged chain of mountains—what there was of a scarcely distinguishable road—encumbered with rocks and boulders, and evening was fast approaching, when the "Black Valley" presented itself to view.

The said valley was some seven or eight miles in width, and bounded to the north by another chain of mountains (we were coming from the south). It narrowed to the east, till, some ten miles off, it seemed to be hill-enclosed. In the centre was a dark-looking, sluggish stream, known as the Kara Su, or Black-water, and this flowed to the west along an open plain which extended beyond the reach of vision.

"Well," I said, turning to the muleteer, "this is not a very pretty valley."

"Kara Wady," replied the muleteer. "The curse of God is upon it. But there is a bridge, Kara Jisr (the black bridge), and beyond it is a village with a seraï."

"A kirwan-seraï (caravansary)," I interposed, smilingly, "that is what you mean. There can be no seraï (palace) in such a place as this."

"It is so, though, sir," responded the muleteer, "and it is the residence of a sheikh of noble descent who has not the best repute, as he levies toll upon all who pass the bridge, and he is head of all the country round. His place is known as Kara Seraï (Black Palace)."

"Everything is kara here," I interjected. "We are now on the Kara Tagh (Black Mountain), before us is the Kara Wady, and yonder," pointing to some objects barely discernible in the distance,

"is the Kara Jisr and Kara Seraï.* Well, we have no alternative but to try and reach the latter before it is dark."

The sun was, indeed, already low in the horizon. Its last rays lingered on the distant hills and mountains in the east with a lurid redness that contrasted strangely with the slough of despond before us. There was, as I have before said, no vegetation either on the slope of the mountains or on the plain beyond.

The soil was at first tenacious and of an ashen-grey colour, cracked and fissured by the sun, but as we advanced it became darker and muddy. The road, such as it was, soon became slimy, and progress was slow and difficult. The splashing of the horses disturbed occasionally snakes of gigantic dimensions with great triangular heads and massive jaws of most forbidding promise. But they wriggled themselves away as best they could into the mud.

We could now see that the Kara Seraï stood upon a lofty mound, also known as Kara Teppeh or "Black Mound," and beyond it were mounds of a lesser degree, upon which were also a few stray buildings. Indeed, as we afterwards learned, this valley of black ooze and mud was flooded in the rainy season and the teppehs and buildings on them were left like islands on a lake.

Crossing a well-built bridge which carried us over a river of ink—black as Erebus or the Styx itself, and which, in this case, more than vindicated its name—we ascended the slopes of the mound just as darkness was impending, and out of it came gradually the figures of two men leaning listlessly against the walls of black adobe, or mud dried in the sun. One was an elderly man, evidently the owner of the seraï; the other, a companion or attendant. Both, however, were stalwart, daring-looking fellows.

To the usual formula of "salaam alaikum" the response of "alaikum salaam" was returned in sullen tones.

"What angel of evil sends you here? We have got the plague!"

"Oh," I replied, "I suppose you have that always." Then, turning to the muleteer: "How far is it to the next village?" I inquired.

"Ten long hours, over the next range of mountains."

"Then there is no help for it. I suppose the plague is not in the seraï," I said, jumping off my horse, and leading the way, followed by the Sheikh and his acolyte, who had together long been watching our laborious approach, as also by my faithful Abd-allah, whilst the horses were left to be provided for by the sagacious muleteer.

The guest-room of the seraï was a lofty, spacious apartment, but with a very ruinous aspect. On one side were some worn-out cushions, intended to represent a divan; and, on the other, an

* The word "Kara" is used in many senses. In its simple meaning, it means black, as in kara-kalpak or "black caps." Applied to a mountain or river, it means dark or gloomy, but applied to an edifice or ancient site, it means ruinous. Applied to individuals, it has a variety of meanings.

indescribable assemblage of rotting saddles, broken bridles, rusty arms and tasselled accoutrements cast in disorder—relics of bygone predatory exploits—that had been now abandoned.

I shuddered involuntarily at the aspect of things. It was but too evident that we were in a den of thieves. But determined to put the best face upon matters, I attempted some light conversation.

"You have a bad road here," I ventured to remark. "Not many travellers, I suppose?" This to the Sheikh, who had taken his place at the head of the divan, and had, with his only follower, assumed the inevitable chibouk.

"It is not a beautiful road," he replied, in anything but sympathetic tones, "but it is the only one in the country, and thanks to the munificence of the great Sultan Selim—blessed be his memory—the river has a bridge over it; and, thanks to my ancestors, I have a seraï wherein to receive toll from travellers. It is a legacy bequeathed by the blessed Sultan to the family."

"Oh!" I said, fully appreciating the meaning of the noble sheikh. "But how do you live here? You have neither cattle, nor goats, nor fowls, and neither garden nor cultivation. No food for either man or beast!"

"We send to market once a month for rice, burghul (maize and wheat), coffee and tobacco. We want nothing more. As to the horses, they can eat burghul. But we have a market here twice a year—a bazaar—hundreds of people," and the old Sheikh's eyes brightened up as he proceeded. "We have tom-toms and village maidens. Ah! you should see Kara Seraï then!"

"Thanks! You are not even now alone here. You have neighbours." It is not etiquette to ask if there was a harem in the ruin beyond.

"Yes, plenty, but they are all robbers. They exact the tolls and the backshishes that are due to me only as the Sheikh; but they are of no use now. They are laid up with the black-fever."

"Confound the word," I inwardly groaned; "everything is black here."

"Are there any black fish in the river?" I wickedly propounded.

"Yes, plenty; but they are not good for the stomach."

No wonder, I thought; yet the Roman epicureans delighted in the black fish of the Orient. We were here interrupted by Abd-allah coming in with the saddle-bags.

"Master will have to open a tin," said the youth cheerfully. "I have got the women to pick some rice, but it is black, and Allah knows when it will be ready."

"Black again," I muttered. "Well, Abd-allah, you can light me a pipe, and then get whatever is handy out of the bags for a feed. am told there is a bazaar here."

Abd-allah laughed. "There are two or three posts and a few broken planks down in the hollow, between this teppeh and the

next," he replied, "but everything alike is desolate and ruinous here."

"Kara! Kara!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands to heaven. "The light of the Prophet has never gleamed upon this place."

"You do us a gross injustice!" angrily retorted the Sheikh. (He had been put out ever since I insinuated that they must always have the plague in the place.) "There was a masjid (mosque) here, with a handsome minaret, from whence, in olden times, the mollah used to call us to prayer; but alas! it has all crumbled to ruin now. The fortunes of the sheikhs of Kara Seraï fell when everybody took to helping themselves. There is, indeed, a curse upon the land."

"And will be in any other place," I said to myself, "where there is neither law nor order."

Abd-allah had in the meantime opened a tin of boiled beef, carefully reserved for extreme occasions like the present (the rice did not put in an appearance till midnight), and we both set to work upon it, assisted by mouldy bread. The Sheikh and his friend contemplated our proceedings with very wistful eyes.

"It is pig!" I maliciously ejaculated.

"Shaitan!" shouted the Sheikh. "And do you, a servant of God," addressing Abd-allah, "partake of such obscene food?"

"Master," said Abd-allah, deprecatingly, "is fond of kef (a joke). It is the flesh of ox."

But just at that moment the muleteer rushed into the room in a state of great excitement, exclaiming:

"Kursis! Kursis! The robbers are coming."

And, as if in obedience to his words, in poured a motley group of tattered, unkempt, grisly and sickly-looking beings, some tottering, some faint from fever, and almost all with blotches and sores on their bodies—hideous to look at.

I neither waited for explanation nor expostulation. The scene presented was enough of itself to demand immediate action. Seizing a revolver, whilst Abd-allah took another from his belt, we confronted our visitors, bidding them peremptorily to take themselves off.

"We will have backshish first," exclaimed one of them, in harsh guttural tones, whilst others made futile attempts to brandish their short clubs. Poor plague-stricken bandits! They had barely life left in their veins to carry out their intended assault.

"You shall have nothing of the kind," I shouted. "Were it not that you are a parcel of contaminated wretches, I and Abd-allah would cast you out of the room; but look, we have pistols—they go off not once, but five times—and if you do not take yourselves off we will hit every plague spot in your bodies."

"Allah! Mash-allah!" grunted the miscreants. "These travellers are in conspiracy with Eblis! Is that Shaitan of a Sheikh to have all the booty? Not while we live."

I hesitated. I could not jostle the hideous crew. To have shot

down such miserable creatures would have been little better than murder; yet, to allow them to come into close contact, with their envenomed skins and polluted breath, was almost certain death in its worst form.

A sudden thought flashed across my mind at this juncture. I remembered, when a boy, having seen an old play called "The Miller and his men." I had it. Here was the miller, composedly smoking his chibouk (I wished the mouthpiece had been the head of one of the snakes of the previous evening), and I turned to him:

"Now, Sheikh," I said, and I pointed my revolver at him as I spoke: "order your karabalah (blackguards) out of the room, or I will shoot you as the first of the lot."

"Zara Yoke! Take no heed of them," said the Sheikh. "They are mad with the fever. Go to your house, my men," he added, addressing the intruders, "and I swear by the Prophet whatever backshish the noble traveller bestows upon us shall be fairly divided."

Thus, half pacified, and apparently not exactly liking the appearance of things, they departed, not, however, without audible grumbling.

We were not disturbed during the few hours that remained to us for rest, save by occasional moans and lamentations coming from the quarter of the invisible. All was not happiness in Kara Seraï.

Needless to say, we started from this plague-stricken hole with the earliest dawn. The Sheikh had a backshish in return for his peculiar generosity, but I feel certain his followers had from out of it only some infinitesimally small paras.

But, oh! how delighted we were, when after splashing through miles of mud, we gained terra firma, and began to ascend a range of granite mountains just as the sun was rising—the quartz and mica glittering in its beams.

Abd-allah smiled, and even the stolid muleteer grinned, as I turned round and waved my hand to bid adieu to the "Black Valley," with its ruinous Seraï, its disreputable Sheikh, and its mournful river.

A LITTLE MAID, AN OLD MAID, AND THE MAJOR.

By Joyce Darrell.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. SHERLOCK SHOWS HER DISPLEASURE.

HIS wife! The news fell like a bomb-shell upon Silcombe. It horrified even Mrs. Sherlock, for the Bowens had distinctly told her that Major Murdoch was a widower. Unfortunately, reference to them at the moment was impossible, for they had gone off to Paris for a fortnight's holiday, and being bad correspondents, had not yet written to give any address.

The tide of comment consequently flowed on unchecked. Everybody felt that to have passed for a widower, as they persisted in thinking Major Murdoch had done, was a thing to the last degree discreditable.

Then the circumstances of his wife's death seemed to the wiseacres most suspicious. Where had she been before her arrival at Silcombe? Why had she come thither at all? How could the Major have let her live alone in her deplorable state of health?

Was it not shocking that even little Paul had never mentioned his mother—his "poor dying mother?"—Silcombe hastened pathetically to add.

"It is most painful—shocking. Even I, who never gossip, feel compelled to say so much," said Miss Dodson, who had called expressly on Mrs. Sherlock, and poured forth all the scandal that was choking her, undeterred by her hostess's stiffness. "Little did I think when she forced her way into my house that day, that such a dreadful thing was to happen. An elegant, refined young creature she certainly was. The Major always struck me as a man of bad character. I have said so over and over again to Miss Tippany, who is a good creature, although a little absurd, and a terrible gossip, as you know. 'My dear Miss Tippany,' I have said; 'you mark my words; that man is an impostor; and I wonder that nice, innocent Mrs. Sherlock can be so taken in by him.'"

"Indeed, Miss Dodson, you need not have been at the trouble of pitying me. I am not more innocent than anybody else, and I am at a loss to imagine what you can mean by saying that Major Murdoch took me in."

"Well, don't be offended, my dear madam. Perhaps you have been wide awake the whole time. But you cannot deny that yours

is the only house at which Major Murdoch has visited, and that he has been here perpetually."

"Perpetually? Miss Dodson, I think that you might measure your words more! Major Murdoch was introduced to me by my dear brother-in-law, Dr. Bowen, and we received him kindly, being under great obligations to him for saving the life of darling Jack. But we have never grown especially intimate with him."

"Not even Miss Carleton?" inquired Miss Dodson, with a disagreeable smile.

Mrs. Sherlock, already flushed, grew pinker. "Is it your intention to insult my niece?"

"Good gracious—no! I never insult anybody. In fact, as a rule I never talk to people about themselves or their affairs. But we have always been friendly, my dear Mrs. Sherlock, and I felt that it would be ungenerous on my part not to make at least one effort to open your eyes and ears to all that is going on around you."

Mrs. Sherlock, who regarded herself as a person of considerable penetration, began to feel so exasperated that she could not trust herself to do more than stiffly bend her head; and Miss Dodson rapidly continued.

"You have never guessed, of course, that for months past Miss Carleton's secret previous acquaintance and clandestine correspondence with Major Murdoch have been the talk of the place. As long as he was taken for a widower, there was no great harm in it, one might think. At any rate *I* thought so, and said so; and over and over again I begged people not to interfere. 'Don't enlighten Mrs. Sherlock,' I said; 'leave the poor unsuspecting woman to her belief in her niece.' But now, of course, things are different. A man who, while still married, could behave as Major Murdoch did, is no fit acquaintance for any young girl. He should be banished from every respectable house. Certainly he will never be allowed to darken my doors again."

"I am obliged to you. I can manage my own affairs. And—and I think I will bid you good morning."

Trembling with anger, Mrs. Sherlock rose as she spoke and made Miss Dodson an old-fashioned, formal little curtsey. That lady stared.

"So that's the way you take it! Well, to be sure! I am nicely rewarded. It is the first time I have ever tittle-tattled, and it will certainly be the last. You wish me to go, you say? Oh! I am going, madam, I am going. I never stay anywhere unless I am wanted. Fortunately I have plenty of friends, superior people, endowed with brains and breeding. They would be shocked at the idea of a young girl carrying on flirtations with a married man, and sending him money—actually *money!* But morals at Silcombe appear to be peculiar; as peculiar as the manners—to me both are new, and I—but it's no matter—I—ah! *good* morning!"

And away flounced Miss Dodson, leaving Mrs. Sherlock rooted to the middle of her own drawing-room with horror and rage. She stood perfectly motionless for a few moments, bewildered by the rush of new suspicions, ideas and feelings. Then she suddenly crossed the room with the swift step of a person who has come to a determination, and opening the door let herself out with a sharp bang.

She was hardly gone, when a small golden head appeared peeping cautiously through the curtains that hung in front of a bow window at one side of the room. Assured that everybody but herself had departed, out trotted Effie, who, forgotten by her aunt, had been an unsuspected listener to the late conversation.

She had an indefinite but very firm idea that she ought not to have heard, and that silence on her part would consequently be highly commendable. So instead of following in Mrs. Sherlock's footsteps, she tripped out of an open window, and was presently to be seen wandering with an innocent and unconcerned air among the rose-bushes in the back garden.

Mrs. Sherlock meanwhile had gone in search of Maud, with the intention of severely cross-questioning her. But Maud was out, and this check gave a fresh direction to Mrs. Sherlock's thoughts. She decided not to speak but to watch. The idea of playing the part of an amateur detective was rather pleasing to her—the more so that Miss Dodson's accusations of innocence and blindness rankled deeply. So she decided to say nothing for the present to Maud, but endeavour to discover how far the talk of the neighbourhood was founded. She remembered her niece's mysterious blushes at the mention of Major Murdoch's name, and Effie's story of the meeting at the post-office. She began to feel quite proud of herself for having taken note of the circumstances at the time, and felt more indignant than ever with Miss Dodson, who could think her unsuspecting.

Too excited to sit quietly at home as usual, she went out for a walk, taking Effie with her at the child's request. As ill luck would have it, the first person they met was Major Murdoch. He stopped to speak, as usual, when Mrs. Sherlock, still vibrating from her late reflections, passed him with the stiffest of bows. He stood still with amazement, and the colour rushed to his brow. Effie, indeed, nodded patronisingly to him over her shoulder : but he did not heed her. His feelings were profoundly hurt, and he was conscious of a deeper pang than he had imagined he could ever experience again from the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

With the quick conclusions of a sensitive nature, he explained Mrs. Sherlock's conduct by his wife's late apparition on the scene. He was conscious that Silcombe had not thought the better of him for that unfortunate circumstance. He guessed that ill-natured reports were about, and instantly attributed belief in them to Mrs. Sherlock.

Well, if she must think evil of him she must ; he was not going to trouble to justify himself. It hurt him to reflect that he should not

go again to Elm Tree Cottage, hurt him much more than he expected. But he was not accustomed of late years to be happy, and had resigned many pleasant things, so that a certain facility of renunciation had come to be a habit with him. He believed that to give up his visits to Jack Carleton's family would cost him one pang, and then be thought of no more.

He had little Paul, and he had his profession. Was he not soon going back to India, thither to carry one painful burden the less, and some sharp, regretful memories the more? Few of his experiences in England had been agreeable. In three or four months more the recollection of Mrs. Sherlock's snub would be merged in the general indifference of his retrospect.

He met her once again before her walk was ended, and this time only slightly raised his hat, while he looked steadily in front of him. She, on her side, cut him direct; for like many gentle natures she had, when once roused, the power of accumulating anger unreasonably; and by this time she had persuaded herself that Major Murdoch was a fiend.

Things went rapidly from bad to worse. Little Paul no longer came to Elm Tree Cottage, and turned his head another way when he saw Alfy and Bobby in the street. With the quick instinct of his precocious heart he had divined, rather than learnt by any speech of the Major's, that some cause of quarrel had arisen between the latter and Mrs. Sherlock.

To know this and to blame everybody except his father with Paul was one and the same thing. To show the faintest particle of regret, in his view would have been treachery. He did want desperately sometimes to talk to Effie, but would have died of his longing rather than gratify it, for did not those who hurt or offended his father hurt and offend him?

So he walked past his late friends with a little pale, set face of resolute avoidance, and was quite unaware that Effie several times nearly nodded her curly head off in her efforts to attract his attention.

Loud and frequent was the wondering, and indignant the disappointment expressed by Alfy, Bobby and Edith at this new aspect of affairs. The regret of the latter, indeed, was made more poignant by ungratified curiosity. For Mrs. Sherlock had coldly said one day: "I have reason to think Major Murdoch an undesirable acquaintance," and then immovably abstained from uttering another syllable.

Edith tried to question her, but was promptly set down.

Maud, although tortured by conjecture, had not the courage to interrogate, for the events of the last week or two had plunged her into a whirl of feeling which perplexed as much as it distressed her. Mrs. Sherlock observing her silence and drawing sundry sapient conclusions from it was only confirmed in her own.

All at once Paul fell ill of diphtheria, and for three or four days was at the point of death. The Major shut himself up with the child and the servant, and saw nobody but the doctor. The sympathy expressed for him was tepid. Terror for their own children kept fathers and mothers away; and as he was now the bête noir of Silcombe, even the fussily benevolent left him to his fate.

Mrs. Sherlock, indeed, wrote him a stiff epistle, in the third person, presenting her compliments, regretting that consideration for the children in her own household prevented her visiting Paul, and begging to be informed if there was anything she could procure him which the invalid would like. It was a singularly inconsistent step on her part—one of the odd compromises, in fact, which illogical and kind-hearted people make with their consciences.

Not unnaturally the Major resented it almost more than he had done her cutting him, and declined her offers in an epistle as formal and curter than her own. All communication then ceased between the two houses for five or six days, when it was suddenly re-opened in an unexpected manner.

Effie had been greatly pre-occupied about Paul's illness, and had never passed Vine Cottage without glancing wistfully and inquisitively up at the windows of the room where he lay. She had begged to be allowed to visit him, and cried when told that it would be impossible in any case, and dangerous to herself even if possible.

But as everything is known in Silcombe, about the tenth day of Paul's illness it was known that he was fairly convalescent.

The news was brought to Maud by a visitor to her studio, who shortly afterwards departed to carry it elsewhere. Maud had heard the announcement with deep thankfulness but had said very little; and Effie who was a listener to the conversation had said nothing.

These two sisters, the eldest and the youngest, were alone at the time, Mrs. Sherlock having taken the two boys and Edith on a clothing expedition to town. Maud had been glad of the rest. It was a relief to be saved for one whole day from the necessity of keeping up an appearance of cheerfulness; for before Effie she felt no constraint, unaware as she was how much that small person's natural perspicacity was sharpened by secret knowledge.

The brief daylight was fading, and Maud, laying down her paint-brush, drew near to the fire, where Effie sat with her favourite kitten on her lap. Unbroken silence reigned for some minutes, during which the kitten after some lazy blinking at the flames, shut its eyes tight and went to sleep.

Maud was so lost in thought that she started, at last, when Effie's small treble broke on her ear.

"Maudie, it's a *very* good thing, isn't it, that poor little Paul is better?"

"Of course, darling."

"His father must be very glad, Maudie."

"Yes."

"Because he has only Paul in all the wide, *wide* world," pursued Effie impressively.

"Why, childie, how do you know that?" asked Maud with a little tremor in her voice.

"Paul told me so. He means never to go away, but to stay with his papa always; so I daresay he prayed to God not to take him now. Don't you think he did?"

"Very likely."

"And it was kind of God to listen, as it would have been *inconvenient* for his papa to have gone to heaven now with Paul, as he wasn't ill, you see; and you must be ill before you can die, mustn't you?"

"Not always. Major Murdoch might have been killed in war."

"But there isn't any war here," said Effie with a silvery laugh of very merry scorn. "Oh, Maudie, you weren't thinking of what you were saying then, were you?"

Then, as Maud only smiled in reply, the child continued: "You would be sorry if Major Murdoch died; you would cry dreadfully; because you are so fond of him."

Maud blushed violently. "Effie, what are you talking about?"

"You are, Maudie; or you wouldn't write to him on the sly, and Auntie Hester wouldn't have been so angry with Miss Dodson."

"Aunt Hester! Miss Dodson! Effie, what on earth do you mean?"

Whereupon Effie, in her rambling yet extremely clear fashion, managed to convey to Maud the essence of the interview between Miss Dodson and Mrs. Sherlock, to which, three weeks previously, she had been an unseen listener. Why she had kept the secret so long and why she told it now, were two things that could only be explained by more insight than we possess into the inscrutable workings of childish logic.

"He looked so surprised when Auntie Hester would not speak to him," continued Effie. "But I daresay he understands now, for auntie wrote to him when Paul fell ill, and I 'spect she told him she was angry because you sent him letters."

Maud's blood froze in her veins. Effie's story told her a great deal but it did not tell everything. She wondered what the exact measure of Miss Dodson's knowledge had been, and how much she had communicated to Mrs. Sherlock. Had the latter learnt about the money? And could she—oh *could* she have said anything on the subject to Major Murdoch? She had written to him as Effie said, and as the reader already knows; but she had been very reticent concerning the whole thing to her nieces, and had shown them neither her own note nor Major Murdoch's answer.

Such reserve boded ill, as Maud knew by previous experience. It

generally meant that Mrs. Sherlock, turning suddenly from mildness to mulishness, had done something supremely foolish. A perfect panic seized Maud, and coming as it did at a moment when her spirits were broken by much secret perplexity and pain, it was altogether more than she could bear. She bent her head on her hands and burst into tears.

Effie was consternated and did her best at consolation. "Oh, Maudie, don't cry!" she entreated. "Auntie won't be angry long. You didn't mean any harm. Just tell her that, and promise not to write to Major Murdoch any more."

"You don't understand, darling," said Maud, taking the child on her knees and tenderly stroking her golden curls. "I am not one bit ashamed of having written to Major Murdoch. I only did it once, and I could not say anything about it for reasons which you would not understand even if I explained them to you. But I was not wrong, although I was foolish: and I am not crying because Aunt Hester is angry."

Effie raised her big eyes, wonder in their depths. "Then why do you cry?"

"Because we ought all of us always to have been kind to Major Murdoch, who saved Jack's life; and now I fear that he has been badly treated and is hurt," said Maud firmly.

"And will that make him sad?" inquired Effie.

"Probably."

"And Paul, too?"

"I daresay. For one thing, Paul must miss *you*, Effie. He has a sorrowful little life at the best, and now he has no children to talk to in Silcombe."

"Then he feels very lonely?"

"I am sure he often does. Poor little heart!" said Maud dreamily and tenderly.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a servant who came with some domestic trouble to claim Maud's attention.

She had to betake herself to the kitchen, and left Effie to her own devices. The child followed her part of the way down the passage; then was arrested in her purpose by the escape of the kitten, which, attracted by the sight of a door ajar, frisked off into the garden.

Effie ran out after him. It was a frosty, but lovely night, and the moon was shining brilliantly. The child stood for a moment looking about her, herself an ethereal, radiant little figure with her white woollen dress and golden hair. Unconsciously her imagination was seized by the beauty of the moonlight and the soft sighing of the wind through the leafless branches of the trees. She began to feel excited and adventurous. Suddenly she had a vivid picture of Paul lying in his little bed staring, perhaps, at the moon which was looking in at him in a friendly manner through the window. Poor little Paul, with no playmate but the moon!

Effie had reached the garden-gate by this time, and found it open. There was not a creature visible in the road, which stretched broad, brightly illumined and tempting before her. Just where it made a turn, one side of Vine Cottage was visible. That was the gable end in which Paul's room was situated. Effie remembered that, and looked longingly towards it. Presently the longing became an impulse, an irresistible impulse, and with a furtive glance round, the little maiden tripped through the gate, then fled like a sprite down the shining path.

CHAPTER V.

EFFIE'S VISIT.

PAUL was lying in his bed, with the moon looking in at him through the unshuttered window just as Effie had imagined. He had been left alone for a few moments—his father having gone for a brief walk —the first for more than a week, while the servant stepped out to fetch something.

Paul had been dozing, and awakened to find that the moon, which he had longed for, had come round to the window just opposite his bed, and made a broad band of light in that one spot, while the rest of the room was only faintly illumined by the flicker of a small fire.

The whole effect was dreamy, and Paul, still very weak, dropped again into a semi-somnolent state, haunted by visions from the fairy tale that his father had been softly reading to him an hour before.

It seemed to the boy as if some ethereal visitant from that untrodden land of magic flitted suddenly across the moonlit space just as his eyes were closing.

The fall of an ember suddenly roused him again. He looked up, and became aware that in the shadow at the foot of his bed stood a tiny white-clad figure, with shining hair and serious, startled eyes.

"Effie!" exclaimed Paul, and the child came forward and stood by him in silence.

She had not been prepared to see him lying there so weak and pale; even in the moonlight she could see how shrunken his little face was, how thin his hands, and unconsciously to herself the sight of him thus awed her.

Paul looked at her in bewilderment for an instant, every other thought swallowed up in amazement at her apparition. Then all at once he remembered the feud, and sullenly turned his head away.

"Won't you speak?" said Effie timidly.

No answer.

"Can't you speak? Are you too ill?"

This was too much for Paul, who felt anxious for her to understand that his silence arose from wounded dignity and not incapacity.

"I'm astonished to see you," he said loftily.

"I ran away. Auntie is not at home, and Maud won't be angry. But she must be looking for me everywhere." And Effie laughed. That elfin peal of merriment ruffled Paul, who relapsed into silence.

"Alfy and Bobby are gone to town," continued his small visitor with the same provoking unconcern. "But I should not have brought them if they'd been at home. Boys are so rough and stupid! I mean those that aren't ill."

Even the flattery implied in this subtle remark did not soften Paul. On the contrary, he saw the opportunity to make a cutting rejoinder, and seized it at once.

"I don't care for Alfy and Bobby to come, or in fact for *anybody* ——" very distinctly.

Quietly, like a spirit, Effie lapsed from the moonlit space, and disappeared into the darkness behind Paul's bed. He felt disappointed: a fact for which he was unprepared, but nothing, he determined, should induce him to show such weakness. This spartan state of mind lasted for five minutes; at the end of which time he twisted his head round slightly, and took a fugitive survey out of the corner of his eye.

"I thought you were gone; and the stairs are dark; you might fall," he said politely.

Thereupon, Effie emerging at once, stood again by his bed, her whole attitude very wistful.

"I came to ask your papa to forgive Maud, because she frets and cries—you should see how she cries," said the little maiden earnestly.

"Papa is out. When he comes in you can tell him. But that would be so long for you to wait," answered Paul, with an air of official consideration.

"Oh! I don't mind. I've nothing to do," said Effie obligingly. "Do you know I've got a new kitten, a grey one. It's always hiding itself, naughty little thing, it's so tiresome! But I'll bring it to-morrow to show you, shall I?"

"Thanks. I don't care."

"Oh, yes, Paul! I'm sure you'd like to see it. It would *amuse* you."

"I don't want to be amused."

A moment's pause. "Won't you make friends?" said Effie pleadingly.

"No."

"Never again?"

"Never."

She leant over him and laid her small fingers caressingly on his cheek. "Don't be cross, Paul, dear Paul," she said in coaxing tones. "Say that you will love me just like at first."

He was melting visibly. The tears even came into his eyes, but

he blinked them away indignantly, and sturdily choked down a treacherous sob, as he answered.

"People should not be unkind to papa."

He expected a protest, but none came. For Effie had laid her cheek on his down-stuffed pillow, and, childlike, was quite absorbed in noticing how soft it was. She went on lifting her curly head and dropping it again with a rhythmical motion, while Paul began to feel aggrieved at her silence and the unconscious contempt with which she had received his latest remark.

"If you'll promise not to be unkind any more, I'll forgive you—and Maud," he said at last.

"I promise," exclaimed Effie brightly, and putting her arms round his neck, she kissed him.

"Good Heavens! How did that child come here?"

This sharp exclamation proceeded from the doorway, on the threshold of which Major Murdoch had paused, while behind him stood the scared figure of the breathless and conscience-stricken maid.

"Please, sir, I haven't been five minutes gone," she began unveraciously, when he cut her short by unceremoniously closing the door. Then he approached the bed in haste and drew Effie away.

"Who sent you here, little one?"

She shrank back in frightened silence, thinking he was annoyed, whereupon Paul eagerly interposed.

"Papa, don't be angry—don't scold her—she's such a little thing! She's come to say Maud is sorry for being unkind, and cries all day. So I said I'd forgive her this once, and so will you—won't you?"

The Major did not reply immediately. He went to the window and pulled down the blinds, then lighted a pair of candles, and finally sitting down drew Effie to his knee.

"Tell me what all this means, my dear," he said kindly. "Why does your sister cry?"

The events of the past fortnight were too complicated for Effie to explain them; but with native acuteness she went straight to the central fact.

"Auntie is angry because Maud wrote to you," she answered, fixing her large eyes gravely on the Major's face.

"Wrote to me? Your sister?"

"And Maud cries because you are hurt."

"But Maud never wrote to me."

"Yes." And Effie nodded pertinaciously.

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed the Major in his perplexity, turning quite seriously to Paul. "I never had a letter from Miss Carleton in my life."

"Maudie wrote—she told me she did," reiterated Effie.

"Papa, perhaps she wrote *anonymously*, like the person who sent you the money," suggested Paul.

"Maudie sent you money. Miss Dodson said so!" exclaimed Effie, with a sudden flash of memory.

The Major gasped. It abruptly occurred to him that one day at Elm Tree Cottage he had caught sight of Maud's handwriting, which was rather peculiar, and had vaguely recognised it as a hand that he had seen somewhere before. He remembered now—it was the same writing as that of the superscription on the envelope which he had precipitately burnt—the envelope containing the mysterious ten pounds.

This discovery affected him strangely, and there was a curious ring in his voice as he again addressed Effie.

"Try and tell me everything, my dear. Do you say your aunt is angry with your sister?"

"Miss Dodson made her angry. She said everybody was talking about Maud, and saying she was wicked, and you too. But Maud does not mind. She says she won't say why she wrote to you, and she doesn't care about the unkind people, and she only cries because you are offended."

"And did you come here all alone to say this?"

"Yes. I ran away!" cried Effie, with returning glee at the thought, and looking up merrily in the Major's face.

He gave the tiny form one irresistible hug; then, struck by a sudden alarming thought, rose hastily exclaiming, "You must go, darling, and at once."

Calling the maid he bid her explain to Miss Carleton that the little girl had found the hall-door of Vine Cottage open and had slipped upstairs. How long she had been there the Major did not know, but he would send to inquire the next day if she had taken cold.

Suddenly realising at this point that she had on no outdoor clothing, he fetched a large fur-lined cloak that had seen much rough service under alien skies and beside camp fires, and clumsily but tenderly he wrapped the child up in it.

She, now in the wildest spirits, was enchanted with this attire, especially when the big hood was drawn round her golden curls and fell over her nose.

"Paul, don't I look like a great, big, furry bear? Maud won't know me. She'll be quite frightened till she sees my face."

Paul, equally delighted with this notion, wrinkled up his little white face with laughter. But the Major, apparently in a great fidget now, said there must be no more delay, and hurried Effie off.

She wanted to kiss Paul again, but this was not allowed; the Major's brow even contracting with some secret thought as he refused the request. So Effie had to be satisfied with pressing up her rosy mouth and blowing kisses all along her passage to the door, besides calling out—"Good-bye, Paul, dear Paul," half-a-dozen times at least.

When she was fairly gone (to be met, it may be said, by Maud and

two frightened servants in the road) the Major sat down beside his little son's bed and fell into a reverie. For years no such thoughts had poured balm on his wounded spirit as soothed and consoled it now.

He was a man to whom, as already said, Fate had doled out but a stepmother's meed of kindness. He was very modest, manly, brave, with a simple and earnest ideal of duty. These are great qualities, but they need some great crisis to call them out. So it followed that while other men basked in the sunlight of official favour, Arthur Murdoch had quietly worked and waited in the shade. Waited—while the years slipped by and brought him the failure of many hopes, the blighting of many illusions, the destruction of more than one great trust. Worked—until the full and patient, unrewarded achievement of every task allotted to him had come to be almost the only joy that life could still afford.

In the isolation of spirit, to which some elements of special bitterness had recently been added, the Major was profoundly touched by the knowledge of Maud's impulsive generosity. The anonymous gift which at one time had looked too much like an alms to recommend itself to his pride, suddenly came to have a rare and precious significance. He recalled all the circumstances of his first meeting with Maud in the waiting-room of the railway station, and remembered that he had sat beside her perusing with some bitterness a letter of refusal to the first request for money which he had ever addressed to a living soul.

Paul had been very ill with a malady which, if less acute, had been longer and more trying than that from which he was now recovering. Claims, at all times burdensome, had pressed more heavily than ever on the Major and drained his slender purse. The doctors urged the necessity of an immediate removal of Paul to the country, averring that in purer air lay his best chance of life. The boy himself —with one of those invalid's fancies which are so touching in a child —had longed for the change intensely.

The next money the Major was to receive would not be due for a fortnight. Under these circumstances, beset on every side and harassed in a thousand ways, he had, after a severe struggle, decided on applying to his only near relative, a baronet uncle, for an advance of twenty pounds. His letter remained for some weeks unanswered; and meanwhile Paul had been invited to stay at the Abbey, and things had insensibly righted themselves as things so often do.

Major Murdoch regretted ever having written his letter, and regretted it still more the day when the tardy answer at last came, containing a curt refusal.

It had reached him at a bad moment, when many things had combined to make life seem even gloomier than usual. With an impulse of self-tormenting cynicism very rare in him, he had taken out the letter, while waiting for his train, and read it a second time.

Then it was that Maud had caught sight of it, as he stooped to lift her dropped package—the Major understood it all now, and recalled the pitying, troubled glance from her lovely eyes which at the time had interested, perplexed and a little annoyed him.

Then as soon as she returned home she had drawn out a part, perhaps all, of her earnings, and sent them to him anonymously! It was a generous act, and how badly it had been rewarded! All the village had been talking of it, deforming its grace and defiling its purity. The Major's blood boiled at the thought!

The next day Paul was not quite so well. Perhaps he had been rather too much excited by Effie's visit; perhaps he was only passing through one of the many mysterious phases of convalescence. However that might be, the Major—more distrustful now than ever of the servant—could not leave him, and was consequently forced to delay the execution of a project which he had conceived.

Some twenty-four hours later, however, the boy having taken a decidedly favourable turn, the Major started off and somewhat astonished Dr. Dodson by calling on him. They had hardly met, and had not spoken since the day of Mrs. Murdoch's death—the young doctor having chosen, in common with almost everybody else, to assume that some mystery, disgraceful to Arthur Murdoch, lay under that unlucky circumstance.

To surprise succeeded consternation when the Major, somewhat curtly, announced that he had come to seek an explanation of Miss Dodson's unwarrantable use of his own and Miss Carleton's name. The doctor at first was a little inclined to bluster, but this tendency vanished before his visitor's cool firmness. Perplexed and angry, but vanquished, he helplessly called in his sister.

The reader's imagination can easily supply her behaviour. She began by declaring that nobody had ever called her to account for her words before. Then she tried insolence, but was scared into silence by a sudden flash of the Major's eyes. Her accuser's determination held her as in a vice. Her brother, having always been dominated by her, deserted her, as was inevitable, in the hour of need; and she finally extricated herself in the best way she could by giving up the name of Mrs. Welbrow as her informant.

The Major then betook himself to the post-mistress, and inflicted on that aggrieved functionary a rebuke such as she had rarely listened to. She was frightened at the possible prospect of being reported and losing her post, and for three days she hardly gossiped to anybody, and to Miss Dodson never again.

Major Murdoch's next step was to write to Maud. In a few manly, grateful words he expressed his sense of her exquisite kindness, and had the delicacy to attribute it, in great measure, to her knowledge of his friendship with Jack. He enclosed her a cheque for ten pounds, "the aid which her generous loan had supplied being," as he expressed it, "no longer needed;" and he concluded by asking

if she would trust him sufficiently to authorise him to stamp out, in his own way, the malignant gossip to which her self-forgetful impulse had so unaccountably given rise.

The Major read over his note when he had finished it: then gave an impatient, regretful sigh. "God bless her!" he thought: "I wish she could read between the lines and understand all that I feel and cannot, dare not say. Will she think me cold, I wonder? But I have no right to wonder about it. No right to cast, even by so much as one moment's longing, the shadow of my sorrowful and wasted life over her pure spirit—my gentle darling!"

Maud's answer came back—a few hurried lines written in pencil. "I thank you earnestly," she wrote. "I leave everything in your hands. But for myself I care, at this moment, neither for good nor evil report. My little sister is ill with diphtheria."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR'S REVENGE.

It was too true. Effie fell ill on the evening of the very day succeeding her visit to Paul. Perhaps she caught the disease from him; perhaps she would have taken it in any case. The origin mattered little once the fatal fact was there.

It is needless to dwell on the agony of those days.

The child's sweetness had never been more apparent—never bound her more closely to the hearts that now only throbbed in the one passionate prayer for her recovery.

For five days she hung between death and recovery; for yet another five it was doubtful whether the terrible disease even when leaving her had granted strength enough for her to struggle back to life.

But at last Maud's agonised watching had its reward—a morning dawned when Effie smiled with her old smile to the faces round her bed: when her tiny face looked less wan and wasted, and when the paralysing weakness left her little tender limbs.

All Silcombe had been absorbingly interested in her: and most frequent, in the first days of the illness, among inquiring callers was the Major. He had even made an effort to see Mrs. Sherlock; but she had refused to receive him. According to her peculiar mode of reasoning, it was primarily his fault that Effie had fallen ill: and she took her stand upon principle in marking her sense of his conduct.

The poor Major was very unhappy, not because of Mrs. Sherlock's anger, indeed; but because of Effie's sufferings, and the dreadful possibility of her owing them to his own boy's kiss. His kind heart was torn for the child and torn for Maud. But there was no one to whom he could say it, as he was more out of favour than ever, Mrs. Sherlock's point of view having many participators, who had almost

brought themselves to regard Major Murdoch as a baleful personage, sowing sin and sorrow wherever he went.

In the midst of all this the Bowens, who had extended their tour to the Riviera and been a month away, came home.

Almost on the same day the Major received a telegram which seemed to cause him some perturbation of spirit. He hastily packed his things, gave up his house, and prepared for departure, having previously made arrangements with his friends at the Abbey (who had no children) once again to receive the still feeble, though now thoroughly convalescent, Paul.

The news of his sudden flitting being speedily known caused some excitement. But as he called to bid farewell to nobody in Silcombe, nobody was able to question him, or divine from his manner the reason of his move.

The one family that he took leave of were the Bowens. That is to say, he was closeted one morning with the Doctor for a good hour, during which time Mrs. Bowen suffered some pangs of curiosity. She was afraid "poor Arthur Murdoch" had come to borrow money of her good husband, and hoped the latter would not be so imprudent as to lend any.

The interview over, the Major bid her a hasty good-bye, and was seen to the door by Doctor Bowen, who returned rubbing his hands and looking rather mysterious and alert. His better-half asked a few dexterous questions, but received only unsatisfactory answers, and began to feel more convinced than ever about the borrowing.

"I am afraid he will never do any good for himself—that poor fellow," she said.

"Oh! I don't know," answered the Doctor absently; then asked, after some minutes' meditation: "You know that old cat at Silcombe, the young Doctor's sister, don't you, Mary?"

"We have just exchanged cards. And she has invited us to an afternoon tea for the day after to-morrow. But I intend to decline."

"Don't!" said the Doctor briskly. "I should like to go."

Mrs. Bowen was petrified, but as her husband took himself away without vouchsafing any further remark, she had no choice but obedience, mixed with still greater curiosity.

Who so delighted as Miss Dodson when in the middle of her party the door opened to admit the comfortable-looking and worthy couple into whose well-kept house it was one of her social ambitions to penetrate? She was flushed already, but grew pinker with gratification, and some of her emotion communicated itself to her faithful lieutenant, Miss Tippany, who remembered that even "poor mamma" had always considered people like the Bowens unobjectionable.

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Dodson, "this is *most* kind. My dear friend Mrs. Weston" (the squire's wife) "sent me an excuse five minutes ago; but now I declare I feel indemnified. Dear Mrs.

Bowen, do sit down. A cup of tea, after your cold drive. Your good husband is looking ten years younger than when I saw him last, I vow. And how is your sweet little niece? Such anxiety you must have felt about her. Were you not angry with that strange Major Murdoch for allowing the children to meet? I was furious. And although I never mix myself up in my neighbours' affairs, I positively was tempted on this occasion to give him a piece of my mind."

"I am afraid he won't get it now. He's gone away," said Doctor Bowen from a post of vantage on the hearthrug.

He spoke very loudly, and the fifteen or sixteen people present stopped dropping remarks down the empty wells of one another's minds to listen to him.

"Yes, indeed, vanished altogether," answered Miss Dodson effusively. "And indulgent though I hope I am, I cannot help feeling his loss is a gain to Silcombe."

"What's more," continued the Doctor impressively, "I don't think he will ever return—at any rate—as Major Murdoch."

A general gasp.

"An impostor!" exclaimed Miss Dodson. "I always said so ——"

"You showed your penetration. He did not look like a gentleman, did he?"

"Not one atom."

"Nor behave like one?"

"Quite the contrary ——"

"And he was excessively vicious ——"

"A *vile* man ——"

"A bad husband ——"

"Oh!" Miss Dodson threw up her hands and eyes in an assentient horror.

"A worse father ——"

"You may well say so ——"

"And an unprincipled flirt ——"

The Doctor let his eyes travel round the circle in search of a dissenting opinion. Evidently there was not one. Only his wife was staring at him with an air of stupefaction.

"*Dear* Dr. Bowen!" cried Miss Dodson, almost with tears in her eyes, "how beautiful it is to hear you say all this! It is what everybody has felt, but few have said. But now that you, who know the ways of the world and the wickedness of men, have had the courage to proclaim it, surely we also can own what we have always thought; namely, that this so-called Major was a monster."

"It's a sad pity," said Dr. Bowen, quietly stirring his tea, "for now he is a baronet."

A faint shriek seemed to pervade the assembly, and Miss Dodson looked as if she were on the brink of a fit.

"Sir Arthur Murdoch, and possessor of a fine place in the north

—worth, I believe, £10,000 a-year. I am sure you must all be very pleased to hear this, especially you, Miss Dodson, who like to think the best of everybody. You will have ten thousand golden reasons in every year for thinking better than ever now of our friend and late neighbour the Major."

"You have come to my house to turn me into ridicule, Dr. Bowen," exclaimed the hostess loudly as soon as she recovered her voice. She was purple with mortification and anger, but her coarse courage stood her in good stead. Dr. Bowen was a gentleman, and felt the force of her rebuke.

"I admit that my conduct is not irreproachable, but it is susceptible of some excuse," he answered, more gravely than he had yet spoken. "I have known Sir Arthur for many years. I have watched his blameless life and pitied his misfortunes. He was married to a woman who disgraced him by her habits, and half-ruined him by senseless extravagance. I was under the impression—gathered I do not now know in what way—that she had died a year or two ago on the Continent. This, as we have all learnt lately, was a mistake. She wandered here, impelled, perhaps, by some instinct of her approaching end—in all probability to seek a reconciliation with her husband. By fits and starts she used to try for that; but as a rule she lived abroad, and between ill health and other necessities was a sad expense to him. But she is dead, and we must leave her memory in peace; the more so that her husband would, I know, be the first to deprecate blame of her; for he is a brave and gallant officer, and a gentleman to his heart's core."

"Indeed he is, hubby," interposed Mrs. Bowen, who, between affection for the new-made baronet and admiration of her consort's eloquence, was worked up to high excitement. The Doctor shared her emotion on both grounds, and he resumed with glistening eyes:

"My niece, Maud Carleton, felt a warm interest—an interest which did her honour—in the Major, who saved her brother's life. Chance made her acquainted with the fact that his means were very straitened, and, acting on a romantic impulse, she sent him ten pounds anonymously, although at the moment she had never spoken a word to him, and he was probably ignorant even that she existed. On all that happened subsequently I need not dwell," and Dr. Bowen's voice grew sterner. "Slanderous tongues took up my niece's name and attributed unworthy motives to her generous act. By the same back-biters the Major's reputation was assailed. Both victims being unconscious, the scandalous rumours spread. If they can be arrested now, that is a chance which we owe to the deed of a little child. Effie, enlightened by accident and moved by love, carried the tale of all this evil speaking to the Major. Thanks to that visit, she has nearly lost her life; but I hope that the lesson of candour which she has taught us will not be thrown away upon those

who, while losing the simplicity of childhood, have lost also its boundless trust."

"Bless him! Isn't it lovely to hear him!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowen to her neighbour.

"And now," said the Doctor, "I think I may go. I came only to carry out a wish of Sir Arthur's, who desired that I should vindicate my niece in as public a manner as possible."

He paused, and looked round the room for an observation; but none came; surprise and embarrassment keeping even the most sympathetic silent. The Doctor did not wait for the feelings which he saw struggling on some faces to find voice; but signing to his wife to rise, tucked her comfortably under his arm, made a comprehensive bow and departed.

The door had hardly closed on him when ——

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Dodson, and glared around apocalyptically. "A nice lecture some of you have had, to be sure! Did I not always say (but I might as well have talked to stones) that Silcombe beat any place I ever was in for scandal?"

Before anybody else could reply, a wailing answer broke forth from the nervously-sobbing Miss Tippany.

"It's t-twenty years since poor mamma was laid in her grave" (sob) "but I cherish her p-precepts to this hour. And I know she never would have f-forgiven me for knowing people who talked scandal of a b-baronet."

"And quite right, too," said Miss Dodson approvingly. "That's the most sensible thing I have ever heard you report of your poor mamma, Miss Tippany. If you had remembered her counsels sooner, or even listened to me, you would not have been in your present scrape. Thank heaven I never interfere in my neighbours' affairs; and so I shall tell my good friend, Sir Arthur, when he comes back, as of course he will do (but a decent time after his wife's death, I hope), to marry that charming little thing, Maud Carleton."

Miss Dodson's kind wish was gratified some months later; but it is not known that she ever found the opportunity of expressing her sentiments to Sir Arthur.

The wild excitement that prevailed on the auspicious day amongst the younger inhabitants of Elm Tree Cottage may easily be imagined.

It was a very quiet wedding. Edith and Effie were the only bridesmaids. The latter devoted herself conspicuously to Paul, having become aware in some subtle way that he was not altogether pleased with the idea that a new mamma was to remove him from the first place in his father's heart. But many of his misgivings took flight at last in the curious and amusing discovery that by the novel arrangement Effie would become his aunt.

A PLAIN GIRL'S STORY.

NOBODY wanted that baby.

The father had realised an enormous fortune in trade, had taken up politics, and his judicious handling of the last had resulted in a peerage. He was getting on in life, when he ceased to be plain Mr. Benson and bloomed forth as Lord Terrick of Terrick Park, and various other holdings. Although he had not infrequently harangued the working people on the luxuries and large tracts of land possessed by a bloated aristocracy, no one knew better than himself the dignity conferred by landed property. He therefore said one thing and did another, as many have done before and since his time. He retained a partnership in the nail manufactory, and made a very successful hit at the head of the right nail when he resolved upon marrying, and marrying a lady. He was fully aware that the agreeable title of "my lord," which surrounded his footsteps with a gentle murmur, was slightly incongruous when applied to himself, and he determined to marry a woman to whom "my lady" was a natural adjunct.

No difficulty about this, everyone knows. The Earl of Ballywally had seven daughters and an encumbered estate. How he greeted the noble nail manufacturer, and invited him to fish for salmon in the Ballywally waters; how the new peer surveyed the seven daughters and finally decided on the youngest, Lady Flora; how Lady Flora, being eighteen, and in love with a penniless soldier of five and twenty, tried to show him that any of her sisters were better fitted for the post of Lady Terrick than she was—these are matters well known. Also the grand wedding, and the welcome home from the Terrick tenantry, and the pale, sweet smiles of the young bride.

A year after there was great expectation. Bonfires were built ready for lighting, the ringers hung about the Terrick Arms waiting their orders, and inside the great house people walked silently and whispered anxiously. At last the old woman who had come from Ireland to nurse the Lady Flora (she had been the darling of her nursery) crept down the great staircase to the library, her heart misgiving her, but a bold front to it all.

"Praise God, yer honour—your lordship has a beautiful child."

Up started the father, a flush on his elderly face.

"A boy?" he cried.

"Nay, yer honour, not this time. It's the finest girl in the world, though."

Down in his chair sat Lord Terrick, angrily glowering at the fire. After a minute's silence, the old nurse spoke, and there was anger in her voice.

"I'll be going back to your lady, my lord. Is there anything to say from your honour?"

"Eh?" he started. "Yes, of course. Very glad it is over. Hope she will soon re——"

Before he finished, nurse was out of the room with a bang, commenting audibly, to the scandal of the servants in the hall, "as hard as his own nails!"

I said nobody wanted that baby, but I was wrong, for the touch of its velvet cheek was the first ray of happiness in the married life of poor Lady Flora. And to last such a little while! For before the argument had fairly been commenced as to the propriety of ringing bells or lighting bonfires, the mother's tired spirit found rest, and the smile on her dead face was all for the tiny girl she left behind.

Lord Terrick never willingly saw the child, and when he did he sighed heavily. He considered his life ruined by the fact that his title would die with him. When the child was a year old, however, and certain matrons were spreading their toils to provide a solace for the widowed nobleman; and when he had sent for the little girl and heaved a deeper sigh than usual over her unconscious head; Lord Terrick died—and snapping the difficult chain of events, left the Honourable Flora Benson heiress-at-law to all he possessed.

Providentially this bereaved child fell into good hands, and received a sound and wholesome bringing up. The fact revealed itself early that she would have no beauty, and as she grew to girlhood her well cultured mind decided that her money would bring much pretended adoration to her feet, and that she would never have the happy consciousness of believing she was loved for herself. When she was eighteen she confided some of her doubts to her aunt and chaperon, the Lady Margaret O'Kelly; and between reasoning and coaxing persuaded that good and affectionate woman to consent to a romantic plan she had formed.

"You see, Aunt Margaret, though my father was a peer, he was also a man of trade. While I live in state in Surrey, large sums of money are paid to my agents by the managers of the manufactory in Staffordshire. There is Ridwell Grange—two miles only from the works. My father lived there till a peerage and this estate were attained together."

"Well, my dear, and do you want to live at Ridwell Grange? It is your own."

"No—not just that," said Flora, hesitatingly.

"What then, child?" asked her aunt, laying down her knitting and adjusting her spectacles.

"You see, aunt, I want to get away from myself for a little."

"The saints preserve us!" cried the Lady Margaret, although she was a very staunch Protestant, and looked upon a priest as the direct and accredited messenger of the evil one. "What has turned your head?"

"Well, auntie, it's this. I'm very ugly, you know."

"Who said so?" inquired the elder lady, in a peppery tone.

Flora laughed outright.

"My looking-glass. No one else has ever suggested, or ever will suggest such a thing. But I have studied my short, plebeian nose, my little eyes, my mouth——"

"Hold your tongue, child!" cried the Lady Margaret, aghast to find how well acquainted her niece was with her imperfections; and conscious, too, that she and her sisters had many times bewailed that Lady Flora's daughter had not one of her mother's features.

"Please, auntie, let me unfold my plan. Before the lovers of my money-bags begin to buzz about me, I want you to travel with me for a little."

"Travel, my dear?" doubtfully answered Lady Margaret. "I'm a sad coward about going across the water."

"There's no water to cross, Aunt Margaret. I just want to go to Staffordshire."

"Dear me! I asked you if you wanted to live at Ridwell, and you said no."

"I'm a tiresome, provoking, troublesome——"

"Have done, now, and tell me what you do want."

"It's just this. I want to find out what would happen to me if I were poor—I mean, with enough to live on, but not an heiress. I want to live near Ridwell Grange with you, and for nobody to know who we are—just for a few months, to see what the tenants are like and the nail-makers' homes."

"My dear, anybody but my doting self would say you were mad!"

"But you won't say it," whispered Flora. And all that evening they sat like two conspirators arranging their plans with bated breath for leaving the luxurious home at Terrick, and setting up in a small furnished house with two servants, one to be taken with them, the other hired on the spot.

On a dark November evening about eight o'clock the train drew near the station, and Flora's eyes had been fixed with a sort of awe upon several flaming, smoking places—the only things visible in the darkness—where the ceaseless work of the iron-trade was carried on. She fell into a reverie, wondering how many of the human beings were working for her, and was roused by her aunt saying:

"I wonder if the carriage——"

"Auntie, we must take a fly, you know," said Flora, deprecatingly. Luckily they were alone, but for their elderly maid, who most unwillingly connived at this demeaning of her ladies. "You are Miss O'Moore, and I am your niece of the same name. We have a modest little income out of which we are going to do as much good as we can."

Lady Margaret repressed a groan.

"And I'll be calling your ladyship 'my lady' as sure as my name's Martin!" mournfully responded the maid.

"Get a fly, please, and if all the luggage won't go on it, send the rest up to Miss O'Moore, Acacia Cottage. Here's the full address."

It was Flora who undertook all the arrangements, and they were soon landed at the neat little furnished villa they had engaged just outside the town. A tidy Staffordshire woman opened the door, and cosy fires burned in the two little sitting-rooms. Lady Margaret looked round the drawing-room, and across the tiny slip of passage, and muttered:

"Like a doll's house!"

"Yes," said Flora, quickly; "so neat and tidy."

After a few days things began to settle down, and Flora made the acquaintance of a working clergyman's equally energetic wife. This lady pronounced the party at Acacia Cottage to be evidently quite respectable, and the girl intelligent and inclined to be useful. She also remarked how very plain she was. Her husband agreed with her, but softened the observation by a well-known proverb—"Handsome is," etc.

Flora gained her object, and became acquainted with nail-makers. First she went over her own works under the condescending guidance of a very vulgar manager to whom a large salary was paid. She appeared to be examining nails, but was really occupied in studying the beings who made them. Very grimy, very stolid in most cases, not much imagination being fostered by their work or surroundings. Some looked thin and ill, many of the young workers especially. Flora found out the wages paid to each, and the manager said they were asking an increase, but wouldn't get it.

"What if they strike?" asked Flora.

"They know better. If they did I'd replace them by other men."

It was getting very cold weather now. Flora went to some of the homes. Wretched, dark and damp, in many cases squalid. She had hard work to gain admittance sometimes, and despaired of reaching the people in her assumed character. At times she found it a relief to wander near Ridwell Grange, and was glad to find the place let and well cared for. There were nice cottages near it, and when resting in one after a long walk, Flora met another visitor who knocked and entered cheerily—all the children running forward to meet him. He began fumbling in his pockets for apples, and then as he offered them, caught sight of Flora. The woman said:

"It's Miss O'Moore, sir; a young lady from the town. She does a deal of good among the nail-makers."

Flora coloured brightly, but before she could disclaim the gentleman said:

"They need friends, ignorant and down-trodden as some are, and puffed with discontent and arrogance the rest. I hear a good deal, for I rent my house from the agent of one of the big firms."

Flora said she had seen some trouble in her short acquaintance with the people, and then telling the woman she must hasten home, she left.

The early shadows of a dull, frosty December day were falling, and she walked quickly as there were two miles of lonely road to travel. Suddenly, from the hedge-row, a wild-looking, dirty man stepped before her. Flora tried to move aside, but the man held out both hands, saying:

"I'm starving. You looks well-fed enough! Give me money, or it'll be the worse for you."

The girl turned pale, but resolute.

"I have no money—let me pass."

"You've got a watch if you have no money," said the man, "and I'll 'ave it."

His dirty hand just clasped her delicate wrist; she shrieked for help, though fearing none was near; then a man's figure, followed by a huge dog, leapt the hedge, and the dog seized the beggar by the shoulder. The wretch let Flora's hand drop with a howl of pain, and the girl felt a dazed darkness surrounding her, and became unconscious.

II.

"My love," said Lady Margaret O'Kelly, "I think our little farce should be ended. We promised to return to Terrick for Christmas, and there is only a fortnight left."

Flora was looking meditatively across the prim little front garden at the milkman's cart.

"You have done all you can for the poor people. I am sure the good vicar and that very gentlemanly man who has Ridwell Grange speak most highly of the good you have worked," pursued her aunt. "And the Grange itself could not be in better hands than Mr. Barrington's—unless you lived there yourself."

"Quite true, auntie," said Flora, turning towards her. "You have been very patient and good to stay so long. I am only sorry to leave my quiet, busy life for all the humbug I shall have to endure."

Lady Margaret looked keenly at her niece.

"You would not be a coward, my dear?"

"No; I don't think so, at least. Dear me, there's the door bell, and Hannah is just bringing our cosy tea! Some old gossip from the villas I daresay—you *are* good-natured to them, auntie!"

But the visitor wore man's attire, and was Mr. Barrington. He came, he said, to ask Miss O'Moore's advice as to some Christmas festivities for the poor, and would her niece do him the kindness to help him?

"I feel great sympathy in your work, Mr. Barrington, but my niece and I are leaving almost directly."

Mr. Barrington looked up quickly, and met Flora's eyes.

"For Christmas?" he asked in a low voice.

"Altogether," said Flora quietly. "My aunt and I only intended a short stay here."

Mr. Barrington became wonderfully silent and distrait, and drank his tea in an absent manner; breaking in upon some conversation with the inquiry:

"When do you leave?"

"In four days," said Lady Margaret. "Pray have some more toast." Flora left the room to send off some letters, and Mr. Barrington said hastily to her aunt:

"Miss O'Moore, may I see you alone this evening, if I call?"

"Certainly," said Lady Margaret, and a curious smile flitted over her face when he was gone. She mused, "I thought something would come of that day when he rescued her from the beggar—such trifles life hangs on! Dear me, what a tale I have to tell!"

I need scarcely say Mr. Barrington proposed for Flora. Her aunt revealed nothing until she had sent the girl to give her own happy answer.

Then with a great rustle of silk, and unnecessary rattling of door handle, Lady Margaret intruded.

"We have a mystery to explain, Mr. Barrington."

He bowed and stared confusedly at both ladies.

"I am not Miss O'Moore, and that is not my niece's name."

A bewildered expression gathered on the lover's face, and he reached out his hand to make sure Flora still stood near.

"In truth, Mr. Barrington, you are Flora's tenant, as she is Miss Benson, of Terrick Park, and I am her aunt, Lady Margaret O'Kelly."

There was blank silence for some seconds.

"Will you forgive me?" asked Flora shyly.

"My darling! if with all these crushing advantages you still can take me, what have I to forgive? At least, you know I loved you for yourself."

"We are so glad of that," interposed Lady Margaret, hastily brushing a tear from her eye. "Flora has been as my own child might have been, and it would have been a sore thing to see her married for her fortune."

Both Terrick Park and Ridwell Grange saw great rejoicings early in the year, and some of the grimy folk in Staffordshire profited by a marriage which brought the owner of the works and her husband many months of the year amongst them.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

IN AN OLD CHURCH AISLE.

I passed an old, grey, time-worn church
As twilight softly fell;
The witching music haunted me
With its impassioned swell.

I crept into the shadowy aisle,
So holy, calm and sweet—
Fit pilgrim's rest for weary soul
And poor, faint, wandering feet.

A halo-circled musty book
Caught my sad, dreamy gaze,
As if some tender gleam had flashed
Far down the long past days.

I opened it. "From Nell to Jim,
Upon their wedding-day,"
Was traced in faint, yet loving lines—
And there a rose leaf lay.

The date? Two hundred years ago.
And who were Jim and Nell?
Oh! moonbeam wandering through the church,
Thou canst the story tell.

Their hearts beat high as low they knelt
Together in this pew;
And they crept closer as they bent,
Belovèd book, o'er you!

They thought the Spring would last for aye—
Ah! happy, youthful prime,
That knew not grief's baptismal tears
Reserved by cruel Time!

The leaf? He plucked a lovely rose
Resplendent with the dew,
As 'neath the everlasting stars
He promised to be true!

Oh! bright the meadow-gladdening sun
Shone in that fair June day;
And merrily the throstle sang,
Upon the hawthorn spray!

But then came Death, with chalice full
Of wine that grief well knows,
When oft thou wert with tears baptised,
Dear leaf of treasured rose.

Now they are joined, poetic leaf,
Beyond Death's dark regret;
But thou dost keep in nestling love
Their memory fragrant yet.

I. M. C.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LAST WORDS.

THE next day, Tuesday, I was very busy, hurrying forward to get down to Clapham in time for dinner in the evening. Lennard's report in the morning had been that Captain Heriot was no worse, and that Mr. Purfleet, who had paid him an early visit, said there might be no change for a week or more.

In the afternoon I received a brief note from Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar, asking me to be in Russell Square the following morning by eight o'clock: he wished to see me very particularly.

Knowing that when he named any special hour he meant it, and that he expected everyone who had dealings with him to be as punctual as himself, I came up to town on the Wednesday morning, and was at his house a few minutes before eight o'clock. The Sergeant was just sitting down to breakfast.

"Will you take some, Charles?" he asked.

"No, thank you, uncle. I have just come up from Clapham, and breakfasted before starting."

"How is Mrs. Brightman going on?"

"Quite well, thank you. It will be a long job, the doctors say, from something unusual connected with the fracture, but nothing dangerous."

"Sit down, Charles," he said. "And tell me at once, is Captain Heriot," lowering his voice, "in a state to be got away?"

The words did not surprise me. The whole night it had been in my mind that the Serjeant's mandate concerned Tom Heriot.

"No; it would be impossible," I answered. "He has to be moved gently, from bed to sofa, and can only walk, if he attempts it at all, by being helped on both sides. Three or four days ago, a vessel on the lungs broke; any undue exertion would at once be fatal."

"Then, do I understand you, that he is actually dying?"

"Undoubtedly he is, sir. I was with him on Monday night, and saw in his face the grey hue which is the precursor of death. I am sure I was not mistaken. He ——"

"That peculiar hue can never be mistaken by those who have learnt from sad experience," he interrupted dreamily.

"He may linger on a few days, even a week or so, I believe the doctor thinks, but death is certainly on its road; and he must die where he is, Uncle Stillingfar. He cannot be again moved."

The Sergeant sat silent for a few moments. "It is very unfortunate, Charles," he resumed. "Could he have been got away it would be better for him, better for you all. Though, in truth, it is not I who ought to suggest it, as you well know; but sometimes one's private and public duties oppose each other."

"Have you heard anything, uncle?"

"I have heard from a sure source that the authorities know that Captain Heriot is in London. They know it positively: but not, I think, where he is concealed. The search for him will now commence in earnest."

"It is, indeed, unfortunate. I have been hoping he would be left to die in peace. One thing is certain; if the police find him they can only let him remain where he is. They cannot remove him."

"Then nothing can be done: things must take their course," sighed the Sergeant. "You must take precautions yourself, Charles. Most probably the movements of those connected with him will now be watched, in the hope that they may afford a clue to his hiding place."

"I cannot abandon him, Uncle Stillingfar. I must see him to the end. We have been as brothers, you know. He wants to see Blanche, and I have written about it to Lord Level."

"Well, well, I cannot advise; I wish I could," he replied. "But I thought it my duty to let you know this."

"A few days will, in any case, see the ending," I whispered as I bade him good-bye. "Thank you for all your sympathy, uncle."

"My boy, there is One above," raising his hand reverently, "who has more pity for us than we have for one another. He can keep him in peace yet. Don't forget that, Charles."

To my office then, and the morning letters. Amidst them lay Lord Level's answer. Some of its contents surprised me.

"Marshdale House, Tuesday Evening.

"DEAR CHARLES,—If you like to undertake the arrangement of the visit you propose, do so. I have no objection. For some little time now I have thought it might be better that my wife should know the truth. You see she is, and has been, liable to hear it at any moment through some untoward revelation, for which she would not be prepared; and the care I have taken to avoid this has not

only been sometimes inconvenient to myself, but misconstrued by Blanche. When we were moving about after our marriage, I kept her in unfrequented places, as far as I could, to spare her the chance of this; men's lips were full of it just then, as you know. Blanche resented that bitterly, putting it all down to some curious purposes of my own. Let her hear the truth now. I am not on the spot to impart it to her myself, and shall be glad if you will do so. Afterwards you can take her to see the invalid. I am sorry for what you say of his state. Tell him so: and that he has my sympathy and best wishes.

"Blanche has been favouring me lately with some letters written in anything but a complimentary strain. One that I received this morning coolly informs me that she is about to 'Take immediate steps to obtain a formal separation, if not a divorce.' I am not able to travel to London and settle things with her, and have written to her to tell her to come here to me. The fact is, I am ill. Strange to say, the same sort of low fever which attacked me when I was at Marshdale last autumn has returned upon me now. It is not as bad as it was then, but I am confined to bed. Spare the time to bring Blanche down, there's a good fellow. I have told her that you will do so. Come on Thursday if convenient to you, and remain the night. She shall hear what I have to say to her; after that, she can talk of a separation if she likes. You shall hear it also.

"Ever truly yours,

"Level."

Whilst deliberating upon the contents of this letter, and how I could best carry out its requests, Lennard came in, as usual on his arrival for the day, to give me his report of Tom Heriot. There was not any apparent change in him, he said, either for the better or the worse. I informed Lennard what I had just heard from the Sergeant.

Then I despatched a clerk to Gloucester Place with a note for Blanche, telling her I should be with her early in the evening, and that she must not fail to be at home, as my business was important.

Twilight was falling when I arrived. Blanche sat at one of the windows in the drawing-room, looking listlessly into the street in the fading light. Old Mrs. Guy, who was staying with her, was lying on the dining-room sofa, Blanche said, having retired to it and fallen asleep after dinner.

How lovely Blanche looked; but how cross! She wore a pale blue silk, her favourite colour, with a gold necklace and open bracelets, from which drooped a heart set with sapphires and diamonds; and her fair, silken hair looked as if she had been impatiently pushing it about.

"I know what you have come for, Charles," she said in fretful tones, as I sat down near her. "Lord Level prepared me in a letter I received from him this morning."

"Indeed!" I answered lightly. "What did the preparation consist of?"

"I wrote to him," said Blanche. "I have written to him more than once, telling him I am about to get a separation. In answer, my lord commands me down to Marshdale"—very resentfully—"and says you are to take me down."

"All quite right, Blanche; that's true, so far. But ——"

"But I don't know that I shall go. I think I shall not go."

"A wife should obey her husband's commands."

"I do not intend to be his wife any longer. And you cannot wish me to be, Charles; you ought not to wish it. Lord Level's conduct is simply shameful. What right has he to stay at Marshdale—amusing himself down there?"

"I fancy he cannot help staying there at present. Has he told you he is ill?"

She glanced quickly round at me.

"Has he told *you* that he is so?"

"Yes, Blanche; he has. He is too ill to travel."

She paused for a moment, and then tossed back her pretty hair with a scornful hand.

"And you believed him! Anything for an excuse. He is no more ill than I am, Charles; rely upon that."

"But I am certain ——"

"Don't go on," she interrupted, tapping her dainty black satin slipper on the carpet; a petulant movement to which Blanche was given, even as a child. "If you have come for the purpose of whitening my husband to me, as papa is always doing, I will not listen to you."

"You will not listen to any sort of reasoning whatever. I see that, my dear."

"Reasoning, indeed!" she retorted. "Say sophistry."

"Listen for an instant, Blanche; consider this one little item: I believe Lord Level to be ill, confined to his bed with low fever, as he tells me; you refuse to believe it; you say he is well. Now, considering that he expects us both to be at Marshdale to-morrow, can you not perceive how entirely, ridiculously void of purpose it would be for him to say he is seriously ill if he is not so?"

"I don't care," said my young lady. "He is deeper than any fox."

"Blanche, my opinion is, and you are aware of it, that you misjudge your husband. Upon one or two points I *know* you do. But I did not come here to discuss these unpleasant topics—you are in error there, you see. I came upon a widely different matter: to disclose something to you that will very greatly distress you, and I am grieved to be obliged to do it."

The words changed her mood. She looked half frightened.

"Oh!" she burst forth, before I had time to say another word. "Is it my husband? You say he is ill! He is not dead

"My dear, be calm. It is not about your husband at all. It is about someone else, though, who is very ill—Tom Heriot."

Grieved she no doubt was; but the relief that crept into her face and tone and attitude proved that the one man was little to her compared with the other, and that she loved her husband yet with an impassioned love.

By degrees, softening the facts as much as possible, I told the tale. Of Tom's apprehension about the time of her marriage; his trial which followed close upon it; his conviction, and departure for a penal settlement; his escape; his return to England; his concealments to evade detection; his illness; and his present state. Blanche shivered and cried as she listened, and finally fell upon her knees and buried her face in the cushions of the chair.

"And is there *no* hope for him, Charles?" she said, looking up after awhile.

"My dear, there is no hope. And, under the circumstances, it is happier for him to die than to continue to live. But he would like to see you, Blanche."

"Poor Tom! Poor Tom! Can we go to him now—this evening?"

"Yes; it is what I came to propose. It is the best time. He——"

"Shall I order the carriage?"

The interruption made me laugh. My Lord Level's state carriage and powdered servants at that poor fugitive's door!

"My dear, we must go in the quietest manner. We will take a cab as we walk along and get out of it before turning into the street where he is lying. Change this blue silk for one of the plainest dresses that you have, and wear a close bonnet and a veil."

"Oh, of course; I see. Charles, I am too thoughtless."

"Wait an instant," I said, arresting her as she was crossing the room. "I must return for a moment to our controversy touching your husband. You complained bitterly of him last year for secluding you in dull, remote parts of the Continent, and especially for keeping you away from England. You took up the notion, and proclaimed it to those who would listen to you, that it was to serve his own purposes. Do you remember this?"

"Well?" said Blanche timidly, her colour coming and going as she stood with her hands on the table. "He did keep me away; he did seclude me."

"It was done out of love for you, Blanche. Whilst your heart felt nothing but reproach for him, his was filled with care and consideration for you; where to keep you, how to guard you from hearing of the disgrace and trouble that had overtaken your brother. *We* knew—I and Mr. Brightman—Lord Level's motive; and Major Carlen knew. I believe Level would have given years of his life to save you from the knowledge always and secure you peace. Now,

Blanche, my dear, as you perceive that, at least in that one respect, you misjudged him then, do you not think you may be misjudging him still?"

She burst into tears. "No, I don't think so," she said. "I wish I could think so. You know that he maintains some dreadful secret at Marshdale; and that—that—wicked Italians are often staying there—singers, perhaps; I shouldn't wonder; or ballet-dancers—anyway, people who can have no right and no business to be there. You know that one of them stabbed him—oh, yes, she did, and it was a woman with long hair."

"I do not know anything of the kind."

"Charles, you look at me reproachfully, as if the blame lay with me instead of him. Can't you see what a misery it all is for me, and that it is wearing my life away?" she cried passionately, the tears falling from her eyes. "I would rather *die* than separate from him, if I were not forced to it by the goings on at that wretched Marshdale. What will life be worth to me, parted from him? I look forward to it with a sick dread, Charles: I do indeed; and now, when I know—what—is perhaps—coming ——"

Blanche suddenly crossed her arms upon the table, hid her face upon them, and sobbed bitterly.

"What is perhaps coming?"

"I'm afraid it is, Charles."

"But what is?"

"An heir, perhaps."

It was some moments before I took in the sense of the words. Then I laughed.

"Oh, well, Blanche! Of course you ought to talk of separation with *that* in prospect! Go and put your things on, you silly child: the evening is wearing away."

And she left the room.

Side by side on the sofa; Blanche's fair head pillowed upon his breast, his arm thrown round her. She had taken off her bonnet and mantle, and was crying quietly.

"Be calm, my dear sister. It is all for the best."

"Tom, Tom, how came you to do it?"

"I didn't do it, my dear one. That's where they were mistaken. I should be no more capable of doing such a thing than you are."

"Then why did they condemn you—and say you were guilty?"

"They knew no better. The guilty man escaped, and I suffered."

"But why did you not tell the truth? Why did you not accuse him to the judge?"

"I told the judge I was innocent; but that is what most prisoners say, and it made no impression on him," replied Tom. "For the rest, I did not understand the affair as well as I did after the trial. All had been so hurried; there was no time for anything. Yes,

Blanche, you may at least take this solitary bit of consolation to your heart—that I was not guilty."

"And that other man, who was?" she asked eagerly, lifting her face. "Where is he?"

"Flourishing," said Tom. "Driving about the world four-in-hand, no doubt, and taking someone else in as he took me."

Blanche turned to me, looking haughty enough.

"Charles, cannot anything be done to expose the man?" she cried. Tom spoke again before I could answer.

"It will not matter to me then, one way or the other. But, Charley, I do sometimes wish, as I lie thinking, that the truth might be made known and my memory cleared. I was reckless and foolish enough, heaven knows, but I never did that for which I was tried and sentenced."

Now, since we had been convinced of Tom Heriot's innocence, the question whether it would be possible to clear him before the world had often been in my mind. Lake and I had discussed it more than once. It would be difficult, no doubt, but it was just possible that time might place some advantage in our hands and open up a way to us. I mentioned this now.

"Ay, difficult enough, I daresay," commented Tom. "With a hundred barriers in the way—eh, Charley?"

"The chief difficulty would lie, I believe, in the fact you acknowledged just now, Tom—your own folly. People argue—they argued at the time—that a young man so reckless as you were would not stick at a trifle."

"Just so," replied Tom with equanimity. "I ought to have pulled up before, and—I did not. Well; you know my innocence, and now Blanche knows it, and Level knows it, and old Carlen knows it; you are about all that are near to me; and the public must be left to chance. There's one good man, though, I should like to know it, Charles, and that's Sergeant Stillingfar."

"He knows it already, Tom. Be at ease on that score."

"Does *he* think, I wonder, that my memory might ever be cleared?"

"He thinks it would be easier to clear you than it would be to trace the guilt to its proper quarter; but the one, you see, rests upon the other. There are no proofs, that we know of, to bring forward of that man's guilt; and ——"

"He took precious good care there should be none," interrupted Tom. "Let Anstey alone for protecting himself."

"Just so. But—I was going to say—the Sergeant thinks you have one chance in your favour. It is this: The man, Anstey, being what he is, will probably fall into some worse crime which cannot be hidden or hushed up. When conviction overtakes him, he may be induced to confess that it was he, and not Captain Heriot, who bore the lion's share in that past exploit for which you suffered.

Rely upon this, Tom—should any such chance of clearing your memory present itself, it will not be neglected. I shall be on the watch always."

There was silence for a time. Tom was leaning back, pale and exhausted, his breath was short, his face grey, wan and wasted.

"Has Leah been to see you?" Blanche asked him.

"Yes, twice; and she considers herself very hardly dealt by that she may not come here to nurse me," he replied.

"Could she not be here?"

I shook my head. "It would not be safe, Blanche. It would be running another risk. You see, trouble would fall upon others as well as Tom, were he discovered now: upon me, and more especially upon Lennard."

"They would be brought to trial for concealing me, just as I was brought to trial for a different crime," said Tom lightly. "Our English laws are comprehensive, I assure you, Blanche. Poor Leah says it is cruel not to let her see the end. I asked her what good she'd derive from it."

Blanche gave a sobbing sigh. "How can you talk so lightly, Tom?"

"Lightly!" he cried, in apparent astonishment. "I don't myself see very much that's light in that. When the end is at hand, Blanche, why ignore it?"

She turned her face again to him, burying it upon his arm, in utmost sorrow.

"Don't, Blanche!" he said, his voice trembling. "There's nothing to cry for; nothing. My darling sister, can't you see what a life mine has been for months past: pain of body, distress and apprehension of mind! Think what a glorious change it will be to leave all this for Heaven!"

"Are you *sure* of going there, dear?" she whispered. "Have you made your peace?"

Tom smiled at her. Tears were in his own eyes.

"I think so. Do you remember that wonderful answer to the petition of the thief on the cross? The promise came back to him at once, on the instant: 'Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' He had been as much of a sinner as I, Blanche."

Blanche was crying softly. Tom held her to him.

"Imagine," he said, "how the change must have broken on that poor man. To pass from the sorrow and suffering of this life into the realms of Paradise! There was no question as to his fitness, you see, or whether he had been good or bad; all the sin of the past was condoned when he took his humble appeal to his Redeemer: 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!' Blanche, my dear, I know that He will also remember me."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DOWN AT MARSHDALE.

It was Thursday morning, the day on which Blanche Level was to travel to Marshdale. She sat in her dining-room at Gloucester Place, her fingers busy over some delicate fancy work, her thoughts divided between the sad interview she had held with Tom Heriot the previous night, and the forthcoming interview with her husband; whilst her attention was partially given to old Mrs. Guy, who sat in an easy chair by the fire, a thick plaid shawl on her shoulders and her feet on the fender, recounting the history of an extraordinary pain which had attacked her in the night. But, as Mrs. Guy rarely passed a night without experiencing some extraordinary pain or other, Blanche listened absently.

"It is the heart, my dear; I am becoming sure of that," said the old lady. "Last year, if you remember, the physician put it down to spleen; but when I go to him to-morrow and tell him of this dreadful oppression, he will change his opinion."

"Don't you think you keep yourself too warm?" said Blanche, who was looking so cool and fresh in her pretty morning dress. "That shawl is heavy, and the fire is warm; yet it is still quite summer weather."

"Ah, child, you young people call it summer weather all the year round if the sun only shines. When you get to be my age, Blanche, you will know what cold means. I daresay you'll go flying off to Marshdale this afternoon in that gossamer dress you have on, or one as thin and flowing."

"No, I shan't," laughed Blanche; "it would be tumbled and spoilt by the time I got there. I shall go in that pretty new grey cashmere, trimmed with silk brocade."

"That's a lovely dress, child; too good to travel in. And you tell me you will be back to-morrow. I don't think that very likely, my dear ——"

"But I intend to be," interrupted Blanche.

"You will see," nodded the old lady. "When your husband gets you there, he will keep you there. Give my love to him, Blanche, and say I hope he will be in town before I go back to Jersey. I should like to see him."

Blanche was not paying particular attention to this message. Her attention was attracted by a telegraph boy, who seemed to be approaching the door. The next moment there was a loud knock, which made Mrs. Guy start. Blanche explained that it was a telegram.

"Oh, dear," cried the old lady. "I don't like telegrams; they always give me a turn. Perhaps it's come from Jersey to say my house is burned down."

The telegram, however, had come from Marshdale. It was addressed to Lady Level, and proved to be from her husband.

"*Do not come to Marshdale to-day. Put it off until next week. I am writing to you.' Wait for letter. Let Charles know.*"

Now my Lady Level, staring at the message, and being in chronic resentment against her husband, all sorts of unorthodox suspicions rife within her, put the worst possible construction upon this mandate.

"I *knew* how much he would have me at Marshdale!" she exclaimed in anger, as she tossed the telegram on the table. "'Don't come down till next week! Wait for letter!' Yes, and next week there'll come another message, telling me I am not to go at all, or that he will be back here. It *is* a shame!"

"But what is it?" cried old Mrs. Guy, who did not understand, and knew nothing of any misunderstanding between Blanche and her husband. "Not to go, you say? Is his lordship ill?"

"Oh, of course; very ill indeed," returned Blanche, suppressing the scorn she felt.

Putting the telegram into an envelope, she addressed it to me, called Sanders, and bade him take it at once to my office. Which he did. But I had also received one to the same effect from Lord Level; who, I suppose, concluded it best to send to me direct. Telling Sanders I would call on Lady Level that evening, I thought no more about the matter, and was glad, rather than otherwise, that the journey to Marshdale was delayed. This chapter, however, has to do with Blanche, and not with me.

Now, whether the step that Lady Level took had its rise in an innocent remark made by Mrs. Guy, or whether it was the result of her own indignant feeling, cannot be told. "My dear," said the old lady, "if my husband were ill, I should go to him all the more." And that was just what Blanche Level resolved to do.

The previous arrangement had been that she should drive to my office, to save me time, pick me up, and so onwards to Victoria Station, to take the four o'clock train, which would land us at Marshdale in an hour.

"My dear, I thought I understood that you were not going to Marshdale; that the telegram stopped you," said Mrs. Guy, hearing Blanche give orders for the carriage to be at the door at a quarter past three o'clock to convey her to Victoria, and perceiving also that she was making preparations for a journey.

"But I intend to go all the same," replied Blanche. "And look here, dear Mrs. Guy: Charles has sent me word that he will call here this evening. When he comes, please give him this little note. You won't forget?"

"Not I, child. Major Carlen is always telling me I am silly; but I'm not silly enough to forget messages."

The barouche waited at the door at the appointed time, and Lady Level was driven to Victoria, where she took train for Marshdale.

Five o'clock was striking out from Lower Marshdale Church when she arrived at Marshdale Station.

"Get out here, miss?" asked the porter, who saw Lady Level trying to open the door.

"Yes."

"Any luggage?"

"Only this bag," replied Lady Level.

The man took charge of it, and she got out. Traversing the little roadside station, she looked to where the fly generally stood; but no fly was there. The station-master waited for her ticket.

"Is the fly not here?" she inquired.

"Seems not," answered the master indifferently. But as he spoke he recognised Lady Level.

"I beg your pardon, my lady. The fly went off with some passengers who alighted from the last up-train; it's not back yet."

"Will it be long, do you know?"

"Well—I—James," he called to the porter, "where did the fly go to?"

"Over to Dimsdale," replied the man.

"Then it won't be back for half-an-hour yet, my lady," said the station-master to Lady Level.

"Oh, I can't wait all that time," she returned, rather impatiently. "I will walk. Will you be good enough to send my bag after me?"

"I'll send it directly, my lady."

She was stepping from the little platform when a thought struck her, and she turned to ask a question of the station-master. "Is it safe to cross the fields now? I remember it was said not to be so when I was here last."

"On account of Farmer Piggot's bull," replied he. "The fields are quite safe now, my lady; the bull has been taken away."

Lady Level passed in at the little gate, which stood a few yards down the road, and was the entrance to the field-way which led to Marshdale House. It was a warm evening, calm and sunny; not a leaf stirred; all nature seemed at rest.

"What will Archibald say to me?" she wondered, her thoughts busy. "He will fly into a passion, perhaps. I can't help it if he does. I am determined now to find out why I am kept away from Marshdale and why he is for ever coming to it. This underhand work has been going on too long."

At this moment a whistle behind her, loud and shrill, caused her to turn. She was then crossing the first field. In the distance she espied a boy striding towards her: and soon recognised him for the surly boy, Sam Doughty. He carried her bag, and vouchsafed her a short nod as he came up.

"How are you, Sam?" she asked pleasantly.

"Didn't think about its being you," was Sam's imperturbable answer, as he walked on beside her. "When they disturbs me at

my tea and says I must go right off that there same moment with a passenger's bag for Marshdale House, I took it to be my lord's at least."

"Did they not let you finish your tea?" said Lady Level with a smile.

"Catch 'em," retorted Sam, in a tone of resentment. "Catch 'em a letting me stop for a bite or a sup when there's work to do; no, not if I was starving for 't. The master, he's a regular stinger for being down upon a fellow's work, and t'other's a——I say," broke off Mr. Sam, "did you ever know a rat?—one what keeps ferreting his nose into everything as don't concern him? Then you've knowed James Runn."

"James Runn is the porter, I suppose?" said Lady Level, much amused.

"Well, he is, and the biggest sneak as ever growed. What did he go and do last week? We had a lot o' passengers to get off by the down train to Dover, the people from the Grange it were, and a sight o' trunks. I'd been helping to stow the things in the luggage-van, and the footman, as he was getting into his second-class carriage, holds out a shilling, open-handed. I'd got my fingers upon it, I had, when that there James Runn, that rascally porter, clutches hold of it and says it were meant for him, not for me. I wish he was gone, I do!"

"The bull is gone, I hear," remarked Lady Level.

"Oh, he have been gone this long time from here," replied the boy, shifting the bag from one shoulder to the other. "He took to run at folks reg'lar, he did; such fun it were to hear 'em sqwauk One old woman in a red shawl he took and tossed. Mr. Drewitt up at the House interfered then, and told Farmer Piggot the bull must be moved; so the farmer put him over yonder on t'other side his farm into the two-acre meadow, which haven't got no right o' way through it. I wish he had tossed that there James Runn first and done for him!" deliberately avowed Sam, again shifting his burden.

"You appear to find that bag heavy," remarked Lady Level.

"It's not that heavy, so to say," acknowledged the surly boy; "it's that I be famishing for my tea. Oh, that there Runn's vicious, he is!—a sending me off when I'd hardly took a mouthful!"

"Well, I could not carry it myself," she said laughingly.

"*He* might ha' brought it; he had swallowed down his own tea, he had. It's not so much he does—just rushes up to the doors o' the trains when they comes in, on the look out for what may be give to him, making believe he's letting folks out and in o' the carriages. I see my lord give him a shilling t'other day; that I did."

"When my lord arrived here, do you mean?"

"No, 't warn't that day, 't were another. My lord comes on to the station asking about a parcel he were expecting of. Mr. Noakes, he

were gone to his dinner, and that there Runn answered my lord that he had just took the parcel to Marshdale House and left it with Mr. Snow. Upon which my lord puts his hand in his pocket and gives him a shilling. I see it."

Lady Level laughed. It was impossible to help it. Sam's tone was so intensely wrathful.

"Do you see much of Lord Level?" she asked.

"I've not see'd him about for some days. It's said he's ill."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Don't know," said Sam. "It were Dr. Hill's young man, Mitcham, I heard say it. Mother sent me last night to Dr. Hill's for her physic and Mr. Mitcham he said he had not been told naught about her physic, but he'd ask the doctor when he came back from attending upon my Lord Level."

"Is your mother ill?" inquired Sam's listener.

"She be that bad, she be, as to be more fit to be a-bed nor up," replied the boy: and his voice really took a softer tone as he spoke of his mother. "It were twins this last time, you see, and there's such a lot to do for 'em all, mother can't spare a minute in the day to lie by: and father's wages don't go so fur as they did when there was less mouths at home."

"How many brothers and sisters have you?"

"Five," said Sam, "not counting the twins, which makes seven. I be the eldest and I makes eight. And, if ever I does get a shilling or a sixpence gived me, I takes it right home to mother. I wish them there two twins had kept away," continued Sam spitefully; "mother had her hands full without them. Squalling things they both be."

Thus, listening to the boy's confidences, Lady Level came to the little green gate which opened to the side of the garden at Marshdale House. Sam carried the bag to the front door. No one was to be seen. All things, indoors and out, seemed intensely quiet.

"You can put it down here, Sam," said Lady Level, producing half-a-crown. "Will you give this to your mother if I give it to you?"

"I always gives her everything as is gived to me," returned Sam resentfully. "I telled ye so."

Slipping it into his pocket, the boy set off again across the fields. Lady Level rang the bell gently. Somehow she was not feeling so well satisfied with herself for having come as she felt when she started. Deborah opened the door.

"Oh, my lady!" she exclaimed in surprise, but speaking in a whisper.

"My bag is outside," said Lady Level, walking forward to the first sitting-room, the door of which stood open. Mrs. Edwards met her.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the old lady, lifting her hands. "Then

Snow never sent those messages off properly after all! My lady, I am sorry you should have come."

"I thought I was expected, Mrs. Edwards, and Mr. Strange with me," returned Blanche coldly.

"True, my lady, so you were; but a telegram was sent off this morning to stop you. Two telegrams went, one to your ladyship and one to Mr. Strange. It was I gave the order from my lord to Snow, and I thought I might as well send one also to Mr. Strange, though his lordship said nothing about it."

"But why was I stopped?" questioned Blanche.

"On account of my lord's increased illness," replied Mrs. Edwards. "He grew much worse in the night; and when Mr. Hill saw how it was with him this morning, he said your ladyship's visit must be put off. Mr. Hill is with him now."

"Of what nature is his illness?"

"My lady, he has not been very well since he came down. When he got here we remarked that he seemed low-spirited. In a few days he began to be feverish, and asked me to get him some lemonade made. Quarts of it he drank: cook protested there'd be a failure of lemons in the village. 'It is last year's fever back again,' said his lordship to me, speaking in jest. But, strange to say, he might as well have spoken in earnest, for it turns out to be the same sort of fever precisely."

"Is he very ill?"

"He is very ill indeed to-day," answered Mrs. Edwards. "Until this morning it was thought to be a light attack, no danger attending it nor any symptom of delirium. But that has all changed, and this afternoon he is slightly delirious."

"Is there—danger?" cried Blanche.

"Mr. Hill says not, my lady. Not yet, at all events. But—here he is," broke off Mrs. Edwards, as the doctor's step was heard. "He will be able to explain more of the illness to your ladyship than I can."

She left the room as Mr. Hill entered it. The same cheerful, hearty man that Blanche had known last year, with fine brow and benevolent countenance. Blanche shook hands with him and he sat down near her.

"So you did not get the telegram," he began, after greeting her.

"I did get it," answered Blanche, feeling rather ashamed to be obliged to confess it. "But I—I was ready, and I thought I would come all the same."

"It is a pity," said Mr. Hill. "You must not let your husband see you. Indeed, the best thing you can do will be to go back again."

"But why?" asked Blanche, turning obstinate. "What have I done to him that he may not see me?"

"You don't understand, child," said the surgeon, speaking in his fatherly way. "His lordship is in a critical state, the disease having

manifested itself with alarming rapidity. If he can be kept perfectly calm and still, its progress may be arrested and danger averted. If not, it will assuredly turn to brain fever and must run its course. Anything likely to rouse him in the smallest degree, no matter whether it be pleasure or pain, must be absolutely kept from him. Only the sight of you might bring on an excitement that might be—well, I was going to say fatal. That is why I suggested to his lordship to send off the telegram."

"You knew I was coming down, then?" said Blanche.

"My dear, I did know; and—— But, bless me, I ought to apologise to your ladyship for my familiarity of speech," broke off the kindly doctor with a smile.

Blanche answered by smiling too, and putting her hand into his.

"I lost a daughter when she was about your age, my dear; you put me in mind of her; I said so to Mrs. Edwards when you were here last autumn. She was my only child, and my wife was already gone. Well, well! But that's beside the present question," he added briskly. "Will you go back to town, Lady Level?"

"I would rather remain now I am here," she answered. "At least, for a day or two. I will take care not to show myself to Lord Level."

"Very well," said the doctor, rising. "Do not let him either hear you or see you. I shall be in again at nine to-night."

"Who is nursing him?" asked Blanche.

"Mrs. Edwards. She is the best nurse in the world. Snow, the head gardener, helps occasionally; he will watch by him to-night: and Deborah fetches and carries."

Lady Level took contrition to herself as she sat alone. She had been mentally accusing her husband of all sorts of things, whilst he was really lying in peril of his life. Matters and mysteries pertaining to Marshdale were not cleared up; but—Blanche could not discern any particular mystery to wage war with just now.

Tea was served to her, and Blanche would not allow them to think of dinner. Mrs. Edwards had a room prepared for her in a different corridor from Lord Level's, so that he would not be in danger of hearing her voice or footsteps.

Very lonely felt Blanche when twilight fell, as she sat at the window. She thought she had never seen trees look so melancholy before, and she recalled what Charles Strange had always said—that the sight of trees in the gloaming caused him to be curiously depressed. Presently, wrapping a blue cloud about her head and shoulders, she strolled out-of-doors.

It was nearly dark now, and the overhanging trees made it darker. Blanche strolled to the front gate and looked up and down the road. Not a soul was about; not a sound broke the stillness. The house behind her was gloomy enough; no light to be seen save the faint one that burnt in Lord Level's chamber, whose windows faced this

way; or a flash that now and then appeared in the passages from a lamp carried by someone moving about.

Blanche walked up and down, now in this path, now in that, now sitting on a bench to think, under the dark trees. By-and-by, she heard the front door open and someone come down the path, cross to the side path, unlock the small door that led into the garden of the East Wing and enter it. By the very faint light remaining, she thought she recognised John Snow, the gardener.

She distinctly heard his footsteps pass up the other garden; she distinctly heard the front door of the East Wing open to admit him, and close again. Prompted by idle curiosity, Blanche also approached the little door in the wall, found it shut, but not locked, opened it, went in, advanced to where she had full view of the wing, and stood gazing up at it. Like the other part of the house, it loomed out dark and gloomy: the upper windows appeared to have outer bars before them; at least, Blanche thought so. Only in one room was there any light.

It was in a lower room, a sitting-room, no doubt. The lamp, standing on the centre table, was bright; the window was thrown up. Beside it sat someone at work; crochet-work, or knitting, or tatting; something or other done with the fingers. Mrs. Snow amusing herself, thought Blanche at first; but in a moment she saw that it was not Mrs. Snow. The face was dark and handsome, and the black hair was adorned with black lace. With a sensation as of some mortal agony rushing and whirling through her veins, Lady Level recognised her. It was Nina, the Italian.

Nina, who had been the object of her suspicious jealousy; Nina, who was, beyond doubt, the attraction that drew her husband to Marshdale; and who, as she fully believed, had been the one to stab him a year ago!

Blanche crept back to her own garden. Finding instinctively the darkest seat it contained, she sat down upon it with a faint cry of despair.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN THE EAST WING.

WHAT will not a jealous and angry woman do? On the next morning (Friday) Blanche Level, believing herself to be more ignominiously treated than ever wife was yet, despatched a couple of telegrams to London, both of them slightly incomprehensible. One of the telegrams was to Charles Strange, the other to Arnold Ravensworth; and both were to the same effect—they must hasten down to Marshdale to her "protection" and "rescue." And Mr. Ravensworth was requested to bring his wife.

"She will be some little countenance for me; I'm sure I dare not

think how I must be looked upon here," mentally spoke my Lady Level in her glowing indignation.

Lord Level was better. When Mr. Hill paid his early visit that Friday morning, he pronounced him to be very much better; and John Snow said his lordship had passed a quiet night. "If we can only keep him tranquil to-day and to-night again, there will be no further danger from the fever," Mr. Hill then observed to Lady Level.

The day went on; the reports from the sick room continuing favourable: my lord was lying tranquil, his mind and brain clear. My lady, down below, was anything but tranquil: rather she felt herself in a raging fever. In the evening, quite late, the two gentlemen arrived from London, not having been able to come earlier. Mrs. Ravensworth was not with them; she could not leave her delicate baby. Lady Level had given orders for chambers to be prepared.

After they had partaken of refreshments, which brought the time to ten o'clock, Lady Level opened upon her grievances—past and present. Modest and reticent though her language still was, she contrived to convey sundry truths to them. From the early days of her marriage she had unfortunately had cause to suspect Lord Level of disloyalty to herself and of barefaced loyalty to another. Her own eyes had seen him more than once with the girl called Nina at Pisa; had seen him at her house, sitting side by side with her in her garden smoking and talking—had heard him address her by her Christian name. This woman, as she positively knew, had followed Lord Level to England; this woman was harboured at Marshdale. She was in the house now, in its East Wing. She, Blanche, had seen her there the previous evening.

Mr. Ravensworth's severe countenance took a stern expression as he listened; he believed every word. Charles Strange (I am not speaking just here in my own person) still thought there might be a mistake somewhere. He could not readily take up so bad an opinion of Lord Level, although circumstances did appear to tell against him. His incredulity irritated Blanche.

"I will tell you, then, Charles, what I have never disclosed to mortal man," she flashed forth, in a passionate whisper, bending forward her pretty face, now growing whiter than death. "You remember that attack upon Lord Level last autumn. You came down at the time, Arnold ——"

"Yes, yes. What about it?"

"It was that woman who stabbed him!"

Neither spoke for a moment. "Nonsense, Blanche!" said Mr. Strange.

"But I tell you that it was. She was in night-clothes, or something of that kind, and her black hair was falling about her; but I could not mistake her Italian face."

Mr. Ravensworth did not forget Lady Level's curious behaviour

at the time; he had thought then she suspected someone in particular. "Are you *sure?*" he asked her now.

"I am sure. And you must both see the danger I may be in whilst here," she added, with a shiver. "That woman may try to stab me, as she stabbed him. She must have stabbed him out of jealousy, because I—her rival—was there."

"You had better quit the house the first thing in the morning, Lady Level, and return to London," said Mr. Ravensworth.

"That I will not do," she promptly answered. "I will not leave Marshdale until these shameful doings are investigated; and I have sent for you to act on my behalf and bring them to light. No longer shall the reproach be perpetually cast upon me by papa and Charles Strange, that I complain of my husband without cause. It is my turn now."

That something must be done, in justice to Lady Level, or at least attempted, they both saw. But what, or how to set about it, neither of them knew. They remained in consultation together long after Blanche had retired to rest.

"We will go out at daybreak and have a look at the windows of this East Wing," finally observed Mr. Ravensworth.

Perhaps that was easier said than done. With the grey light of early morning they were both out-of-doors; but they could not find any entrance to the East Wing. The door in the wall of the front garden was locked; the entrance gates from the road were locked also. In the garden at the back—it was more of a wilderness than a garden—they discovered a small gate in a corner. It was completely overgrown with trees and shrubs, and had evidently not been used for years and years. But the wood had become rotten, the fastenings loose; and by their united strength they opened it.

They found themselves in a very large space of ground indeed. Grass was in the middle, quite a field of it; and round it a broad gravel walk. Encompassing all on three sides rose a wide bank of shrubs and overhanging trees. Beyond these again was a very high wall. On the fourth side stood the East Wing, high and gloomy. Its windows were all encased with iron bars, and the lower windows were whitened.

Taking a survey of all this, one of them softly whispering in surprise, Mr. Ravensworth advanced to peer in at the windows. Of course, being whitened, he had his trouble for his pains.

"It puts me in mind of a prison," remarked Charles Strange.

"It puts me in mind of a madhouse," was the laconic rejoinder of Mr. Ravensworth.

They passed back through the gate again, Mr. Ravensworth turning to take a last look. In that minute his eye was attracted to one of the windows on the ground floor. It opened down the middle, like a French one, and was being shaken, apparently with a view to opening

it—and if you are well acquainted with continental windows, or windows made after their fashion, you may remember how long it has taken you to shake a refractory window before it will obey. It was at length effected, and in the opening, gazing with a vacant, silly expression through the close bars, appeared a face. It remained in view but a moment; the window was immediately closed again, Mr. Ravensworth thought by another hand. What was the mystery?

That some mystery did exist at Marshdale, apart from any Italian ladies who might have no fair right to be there, was pretty evident. At breakfast the gentlemen related this little experience to Blanche.

Madame Blanche tossed her head in incredulity. "Don't be taken in," she answered. "Windows whitened and barred, indeed! It is all done with a view to misleading. She was sitting at the *open* window at work on Thursday night."

After breakfast, resolved no longer to be played with, Blanche proceeded upstairs to Mr. Drewitt's rooms, her friends following her, all three of them creeping by Lord Level's chamber door with noiseless steps. His lordship was getting better quite wonderfully, Mrs. Edwards had told them.

The old gentleman, in his quaint costume, was in his sitting-room, taking his breakfast alone. Mrs. Edwards took her meals anywhere and at any time, during her lord's illness. Hearing strange footsteps in the corridor, he rose to see whose they were, and looked considerably astonished.

"Does your ladyship want me?" he asked, bowing.

"I— yes, I think I do," answered Lady Level. "Who keeps the key of that door, Mr. Drewitt?" pointing to the strong oaken door at the end of the passage.

"I keep it, my lady."

"Then will you be kind enough to unlock it for me. These gentlemen wish to examine the East Wing."

"The East Wing is private to his lordship," was the steward's reply, addressing them all conjointly. "Without his authority I cannot open it to anyone."

They stood contending a little while: it was like a repetition of the scene that had been enacted there once before. And, like that, was terminated by the same individual—the surgeon.

"It is all right, Mr. Drewitt," he said, "you can open the door of the East Wing; I bear you my lord's orders. I am going in there to see a patient," he added to the rest.

The steward produced a key from his pocket, and put it into the lock. It was surprising that so small a key should open so massive a door.

They passed, wonderingly, through three rooms en suite: a sitting-room, a bedroom and a bath-room. All these rooms looked to the back of the house. Other rooms there were on the same floor, which the visitors did not touch upon. Descending the

staircase, they entered three similar rooms below. In the smaller one lay some garden tools, but of a less size than a grown man in his strength would use, and by their side were certain toys: tops, hoops, ninepins, and the like. The middle room was a sitting-room; the larger room beyond had no furniture, and in that, standing over a humming-top, which he had just set to spin on the floor, bent the singular figure of a youth. He had a dark, vacant face, wild black eyes, and a mass of thick black hair, cut short. This figure, a child's whip in his hand, was whipping the top, and making a noise with his mouth in imitation of its hum.

Half madman, half idiot, he stood out, in all his deep misfortune, raising himself up and staring about him with a vacant stare. The expression of Mr. Ravensworth's face changed to one of pity. "Who are you?" he exclaimed in kindly tones. "What is your name?"

"Arnie!" was the mechanical answer, for brains and sense seemed to have little to do with it; and, catching up his top, he backed against the wall, and burst into a distressing laugh. Distressing to a listener; not distressing to him, poor fellow.

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Ravensworth of the doctor.

"An imbecile."

"So I see. But what connection has he with Lord Level's family?"

"He is a connection, or he would not be here."

"Can he be—be—a son of Lord Level's?"

"A son!" interposed the steward, "and my lord but just married! No, sir, he is not a son, he is none so near as that; he is but a connection of the Level family."

The lad came forward from the wall where he was standing, and held out his top to his old friend the doctor. "Do, do," he cried, spluttering as he spoke.

"Nay, Arnie, you can set it up better than I: my back won't stoop well, Arnie."

"Do, do," was the persistent request, the top held out still.

Mr. Ravensworth took it and set it up again, he looking on in greedy eagerness, slobbering and making a noise with his mouth. Then his note changed to a hum, and he whipped away as before.

"Why is he not put away in an asylum?" asked Mr. Ravensworth.

"Put away in an asylum!" retorted the old steward indignantly. "Where could he be put to have the care and kindness that is bestowed upon him here? Imbecile though he is, madman though he may be, he is dear to me and my sister. We pass our lives tending him, in conjunction with Snow and his wife, doing for him, soothing him: where else could that be done? You don't know what you are saying, sir. My lord, who received the charge from his father, comes down to see him: my lord orders that everything should be done for his comfort. And do you suppose it is fitting that his condition should be made public? The fact of

one being so afflicted is slur enough upon the race of Level, without its being proclaimed abroad."

"It was he who attacked Lord Level last year?"

"Yes, it was; and how he could have escaped to our part of the house will be a marvel to me for ever. My sister says I could not have slipped the bolt of the passage door as usual, but I know I did bolt it. Arnie had been restless that day; he has restless fits, and I suppose he could not sleep, and must have risen from his bed and come to my sitting-room. On my table there I had left my pocket-knife, a new knife, the blades bright and sharp; and this he must have picked up and opened, and found his way with it to my lord's chamber. Why he should have attacked him, or anyone else, I know not; he never had a ferocious fit before."

"Never," assented Mr. Hill, in confirmation.

Mr. Drewitt continued. "He has been imbecile and harmless as you see him now, but he has never disturbed us at night; he has, as I say, fits of restlessness when he cannot sleep, but he is sufficiently sensible to ring a bell communicating with Snow's chamber if he wants anything. If ever he has rung, it has been to say he wants meat."

"Meat!"

The steward nodded. "But it has never been given to him. He is cunning as a fox; they all are; and were we to begin giving him food in the middle of the night we must continue to do it, or have no peace. Eating is his one enjoyment in life, and he devours everything set before him—meat especially. If we have any particular dainty upstairs for dinner or supper, I generally take him in some. Deborah, I believe, thinks I eat all that comes up, and sets me down for a cannibal. He has a hot supper every night: about a year ago we got to think it might be better for him to have a lighter one, and we tried it for a week, but he moaned and cried all night long for his hot meat, and we had to give it him again. The night this happened we had veal cutlets and bacon, and he had the same. He asked for more, but I would not give it; perhaps that angered him, and he mistook my lord for me. Mr. Hill thought it might be so. I shall never be able to account for it."

The doctor nodded assent; and the speaker went on.

"His hair was long, then, and he must have looked just like a maniac when the fit of fury lay upon him. Little wonder that my lady was frightened at the sight of him. After he had done the deed he ran back to his own room; I, aroused by the commotion, found him in his bed. He burst out laughing when he saw me: 'I got your knife, I got your knife,' he called out, as if it were a feat to be proud of. His movements must have been silent and stealthy, for Snow had heard nothing."

At this moment there occurred an interruption. The Italian lady approached the room with timid, hesitating steps, and peeped in.

"Ah, how do you do, doctor," she said in a sweet, gentle voice, as she held out her hand to Mr. Hill. Her countenance was mild, open and honest; and a conviction rushed on the instant into Blanche's mind that she had been misjudging that foreign lady.

"These good gentlepeople are come to see our poor patient?" she added, curtseying to them with native grace, her accent quite foreign. "The poor, poor boy!" tears filling her eyes. "And I foretell that this must be my lord's wife," addressing Blanche. "Will she permit a poor humble stranger to shake her by the hand for her lord's sake—her lord, who has been so good to us?"

"This lady is sister to the unfortunate boy's mother," said the doctor, in low tones to Blanche. "She is a good woman, and worthy to shake hands with you, my lady."

"But who was his father?" whispered Blanche.

"Mr. Francis Level; my lord's dead brother."

Her countenance radiant, Blanche took the lady's hand and warmly clasped it. "You live here to take care of the poor lad?" she said.

"But no, madam. I do but come at intervals to see him, all the way from Pisa, in Italy. And also I have had to come to bring documents and news to my lord, respecting matters that concern him and the poor lad. But it is over now," she added. "The week after the one next to come, Arnie goes back with me to Italy, his native country, and my journeys to this country will be ended. His mother, who is always ill and not able to travel, wishes now to have her afflicted son with her."

Back in the other house again, after wishing Nina Sparlati good day, the astonished visitors gathered in Mr. Drewitt's room to listen to the tale which had to be told them. Mrs. Edwards, who was awaiting them, and fonder of talking than her brother, was the principal narrator. Blanche went away, whispering to Charles Strange that she would hear it from him afterwards.

"We were abroad in Italy," Mrs. Edwards began: "it is many years ago. The late lord, our master then, went for his health, which was declining, though he was but a middle-aged man, and I and my brother were with him, his personal attendants, but treated more like friends. The present lord, Mr. Archibald, named after his father, was with us—he was the second son, not the heir; the eldest son, Mr. Level—Francis was his name—had been abroad for years, and was then in another part of Italy. He came to see his father when we first got out to Florence, but he soon left again. 'He'll die before my lord,' I said to Mr. Archibald; for if ever I saw consumption on a man's face, it was on Mr. Level's. And I remember Mr. Archibald's answer as if it was but yesterday: 'That's just one of your fancies, nurse: Frank tells me he has looked the last three years as he looks now.' But I was right, sir; for shortly after that we received news of the death of Mr. Level; and then Mr. Archibald was the heir. My lord, who had grown worse instead of better, was very ill then."

"Did the late lord die in Italy?" questioned Mr. Ravensworth.

"You shall hear, sir. He grew very ill, I say, and we thought he would be sure to move homewards, but he still stayed on. 'Archibald likes Florence,' he would say, 'and it's all the same to me where I am.' 'Young Level stops for the beaux yeux of the Tuscan women,' the world said—but you know, sir, the world always was censorious; and young men will be young men. However, we were at last on the move; everything was packed and prepared for leaving, when there arrived an ill-favoured young woman, with some papers and a little child, two years old. Its face frightened me when I saw it. It was, as a child, what it is now as a growing man; and you have seen it to-day," she added in a whisper. "'What is the matter with him?' I asked, for I could speak a little Italian. 'He's a born natural, as yet,' she answered, 'but the doctors think he may outgrow it in part.' 'But who is he? what does he do here?' I said. 'He's the son of Mr. Level,' she replied, 'and I have brought him to the family, for his mother, who was my sister, is also dead.' 'He the son of Mr. Level!' I uttered, knowing she must speak of Mr. Francis. 'Well, you need not bring him here: we English do not recognise chance children.' 'They were married three years ago,' she coolly answered, 'and I have brought the papers to prove it. Mr. Level was a gentleman and my sister not much above a peasant; but she was beautiful and good, and he married her, and this is their child. She has been dying by inches since her husband died; she is now dead, and I am come here to give up the child to his father's people.'"

"Was it true?" interrupted Mr. Strange.

"My lord thought so, sir, and took kindly to the child. He was brought home here and the East Wing was made his nursery ——"

"Then that—that—poor wretch down there is the true Lord Level!" interrupted Mr. Ravensworth.

"One day when my lord was studying the documents the woman had left," resumed Mrs. Edwards, passing by the remark with a glance, "something curious struck him in the certificate of marriage; he thought it was forged. He showed it to Mr. Archibald, and they decided to go back to Italy, leaving the child here. All the inquiries they made there tended to prove that, though the child was indeed Mr. Francis Level's, there had been no marriage, or semblance of one. All the same, said my lord, the poor child shall be kindly reared and treated and provided for: and Mr. Archibald solemnly promised his father it should be so. My lord died at Florence, and Mr. Archibald came back Lord Level."

"And he never forgot his promise to his father," interposed the steward, "but has treated the child almost as though he were a true son, consistent with his imbecile state. That East Wing has been his happy home, as Mr. Hill can testify: he has toys to amuse him, the garden to dig in, which is his favourite pastime; and Snow draws

him about the paths in his hand-carriage on fine days. It is a sad misfortune, for him and for the family; but my lord has done his best."

"It would have been a greater for my lord had the marriage been a legal one," remarked Mr. Ravensworth.

"I don't know that," sharply spoke up the doctor. "As an idiot I believe he could not inherit. However, the marriage was not a legal one, and my lord is my lord. The mother is not dead; that was a fabrication also; but she is ill, helpless, and is pining for her son; so now he is to be taken to her; my lord, in his generosity, securing him an ample income. It was not the mother who perpetrated the fraud but the avaricious eldest sister. This sister, the one you have just seen, is the youngest; she is good and honourable, and has done her best to unravel the plot."

That was all the explanation given to Mr. Ravensworth. But the doctor put his arm within that of Charles Strange, and took him into the presence of Lord Level.

"Well," said his lordship, who was then sitting up in bed, and held out his hand, "have you been hearing all about the mysteries, Charles?"

"Yes," smiled Mr. Strange. "I felt sure that whatever the mystery might be, it was one you could safely explain away if you chose."

"Ay: though Blanche did take up the other view and want to cut my head off."

"She was your own wife, your *loving* wife I am certain: why not have told her?"

"Because I wanted to be quite sure of certain things first," replied Lord Level. "Listen, Charles: you have my tale to hear yet. Sit down. Sit down, Hill. How am I to talk while you stand?" he asked, laughing.

"When we were in Paris after our marriage a year ago, I received two shocks on one and the same morning," began Lord Level. "The one told me of the trouble Tom Heriot had fallen into; the other, contained in a letter from Pisa, informed me that there *had been a marriage* after all between my brother and that girl, Bianca Sparlati. If so, of course, that imbecile lad stood between me and the title and estate; though I don't think he could legally inherit. But I did not believe the information. I felt sure that it was another invented artifice of Annetta, the wretched eldest sister, who is a grasping intriguante. I started at once for Pisa, where they live, to make inquiries in person: travelling by all sorts of routes, unfrequented by the English, that my wife might not hear of her brother's disgrace. At Pisa I found difficulties: statements met me that seemed to prove there had been a marriage, and I did not see my way to disprove them. Nina, a brave, honest girl, confessed to me that she doubted them, and I begged of her for truth and right's sake, to help me as far as she could. I cannot enter into details

now, Strange; I am not strong enough for it; enough to say that ever since, nearly a whole year, have I been trying to ferret out the truth: and I only got at it a week ago."

"And there was no marriage?"

"Tell him, Hill," said Lord Level, laughing.

"Well, a sort of ceremony did pass between Francis Level and that young woman, but both of them knew at the time it was not legal, or one that could ever stand good," said the doctor. "Now the real facts have come to light. It seems that Bianca had been married when very young to a sailor named Dromio; within a month of the wedding he sailed away again and did not return. She thought him dead, took up her own name again and went home to her family; and later became acquainted with Francis Level. Now, the sailor has turned up again, alive and well ——"

"The first husband!" exclaimed Charles Strange.

"If you like to call him so," said Mr. Hill; "there was never a second. Well, the sailor has come to the fore again; and honest-hearted Nina travelled here from Pisa with the news, and we sent for his lordship to come down and hear it. He was also wanted for another matter. The boy had had a sort of fit, and I feared he would die. My lord heard what Nina had to tell him when he arrived; he did not return at once to London, for Arnie was still in danger, and he waited to see the issue. Very shortly he was taken ill himself, and could not get away. It was good news, though, about that resuscitated sailor!" laughed the doctor, after a pause. "All's well that ends well, and my Lord Level is his own man again."

Charles Strange sought an interview with his sister—as he often called her—and imparted to her these particulars. He then left at once for London with Mr. Ravensworth. Their mission at Marshdale was over.

Lord Level, up and dressed, lay on a sofa in his bedroom in the afternoon. Blanche sat on a footstool beside him. Her face was hidden upon her husband's knee and she was crying bitter tears.

"Shall you ever forgive me, Archibald?"

He was smiling quietly. "Some husbands might say no."

"You don't know how miserable I have been."

"Don't I! But how came you to fall into such notions at first, Blanche? To suspect me of ill at all?"

"It was that Mrs. Page Reid who was with us at Pisa. She said all sorts of things."

"Ah!"

"*Won't* you forgive me, Archibald?"

"Yes, upon condition that you trust me fully in future. Will you, love?" he softly whispered.

She could not speak for emotion.

"And the next time you have a private grievance against me,

Blanche, tell it out plainly," he said, as he held her to him and gave her kiss for kiss.

"My darling, yes. But I shall never have another."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

I, CHARLES STRANGE, took up this story at its commencement, and I take it up now at its close.

It was a lovely day at the end of summer, in the year following the events recorded in the last chapter, and we were again at Marshdale House.

The two individuals who had chiefly marred the peace of one or another of us in the past were both gone where disturbance is not. Poor Tom Heriot was mouldering in his grave near to that in which his father and mother lay, not having been discovered by the police or molested in any way; and the afflicted Italian lad had died soon after he was taken to his native land. Mr. Hill had warned Nina Sparlati that, in all probability, he would not live long. Mrs. Brightman, I may as well say it here, had recovered permanently; recovered in all ways, as we hoped and believed. The long restraint laid upon her by her illness had effected the cure that nothing else might have been able to effect, and re-established the good habits she had lost. But Miss Brightman was dead; she had not lived to come home from Madeira, and the whole of her fortune was left to Annabel. "So you can live where you please now and go in for grandeur," Arthur Lake said to me and my wife. "All in good time," laughed Annabel; "I am not yet tired of Essex Street."

And now we had come down in the sunny August weather when the courts were up, to stay at Marshdale.

You might be slow to recognise it, though. Recalling the picture of Marshdale House as it was, and looking at it now, many would have said it could not be the same.

The dreary old structure had been converted into a light and beautiful mansion. The whitened windows with their iron bars were no more. The disfiguring, unnaturally-high walls were gone, and the tangled shrubs and weeds, the overgrowth of trees that had made the surrounding land a wilderness, were now turned into lovely pleasure-grounds. The gloomy days had given place to sunny ones, said Lord Level, and the gloomy old structure, with its gloomy secrets, should be remembered no more.

Marshdale was now their chief home, his and his wife's, with their establishment of servants. Mr. Drewitt and Mrs. Edwards had moved into a pretty dwelling hard by; but they were welcomed whenever they liked to go to the house, and were treated as friends.

The steward kept the accounts still, and Mrs. Edwards was appealed to by Blanche in all domestic difficulties. She rarely appeared before her lady but in her quaint gala attire.

We were taking tea out-of-doors at the back of the renovated East Wing. The air bore that Sabbath stillness which Sunday seems to bring: distant bells, ringing the congregation out of church, fell melodiously on the ear. We had been idle this afternoon and stayed at home, but all had attended service in the morning. Mr. Hill had called in and was sitting with us. Annabel presided at the rustic tea-table; Blanche was a great deal too much occupied with her baby-boy, whom she had chosen to have brought out: a lively young gentleman in a blue sash, whose face greatly resembled his father's. Next to Lord Level sat my uncle, who had come down for a week's rest. He was no longer Serjeant Stillingfar; but Sir Charles, and one of Her Majesty's judges.

"Won't you have some tea, my dear?" he said to Blanche, who was parading the baby.

By the way, they had named him Charles. Charles Archibald; to be called by the former name: Lord Level protested he would not have people saying Young Archie and Old Archie.

"Yes, Blanche," said he, taking up the suggestion of the judge. "Do let that child go indoors: one might think he was a new toy. Here, I'll take him."

"Archibald need not talk," laughed Blanche, looking after her husband, who had taken the child from her and was tossing it as he went indoors. "He is just as fond of having the baby as I am. Neither need you laugh, Mr. Charles," turning upon me; "your turn will come soon, you know."

Leaving the child in its nursery in the East Wing, Lord Level came back to his place: and we sat on until evening approached. A peaceful evening, promising a glorious sunset. An hour after midday, when we had just got safely in from church, there had been a storm of thunder and lightning, and it had cleared the sultry air. The blue sky above, flecked with gold, was of a lovely rose colour towards the west.

"The day has been a type of life: or of what life ought to be," suddenly remarked Mr. Hill. "Storm and cloud succeeded by peace and sunshine."

"The end is not always peaceful," said Lord Level.

"It mostly is when we have worked on for it patiently," said the judge. "My friends, you may take the word of an old man for it—that a life of storm and trouble, through which we have struggled manfully to do our duty under God, ever bearing on in reliance upon Him, must of necessity end in peace. Perhaps not always entire and perfect peace in this world; but assuredly in that which is to come."

THE END.

PASSED ON!

"A SONG, a song for the children!
As merry as it can be,
Till it's time for the magic-lantern,
And to light up the Christmas-tree.

"A mite, you say, in the street there,
With a fiddle, or some such thing?
Then, have the hall-door set open,
And the children shall hear him sing."

He creeps close up to the window,
He scrapes with his bow for the key:
"Hark, now, he is just beginning—
I wonder what it will be?

"Some pretty old Christmas ballad,
Or a nursery tale in rhyme;
Or perhaps—what is even better—
A song from the pantomime?"

Ah, no, you are wrong, my children,
He brings you no such bright cheer;
For Cold, you see, is *his* Christmas,
And Hunger *his* Happy New Year!

He but sings of how tears are falling,
And falling the long day through,
Though from children the fairies hide them,
Rich children, that is, like you!

Till you stop in your merry dancing,
And sob in the midst of your play,
And promise you'll beg the fairies
To spirit all tears away!

But a pause comes, too, with your pausing;
The poor little quavers cease—
And lo, where the Streets are Golden,
He carols his Hymn of Peace!

WILLIAM TOYNBEE.

PRECEPTS FOR THE WELL-ORDERING OF LIFE.

OF PERSONAL ADVANTAGE.

By the Author of "The Way to Fortune."

LORD BACON, in his essays, remarks that men are often incited to effort to attain mental superiority by the sense of defect in physical gifts. The motive may not be of the highest; but doubtless the result is good.

Men are impelled to seek their ends by many means; and motives are, for most part, mixed in determining human beings to any fixed course of action which implies steady application and self-denial. Pope, too, was fond of dwelling on the same idea, and no doubt felt that he was, in himself, a very apt illustration of the principle.

Imagination, also, comes in with kindliest aid to those who view their defects philosophically. It is, indeed, a kind of Aladdin's lamp to those who will look on the bright side of things. And just as imagination, under morbid stimulus, is apt to magnify and exaggerate to one's disadvantage, so it may be wisely made to minister to self-satisfaction by using the sense of contrast in its service.

A very wise man once said that, for contentment in life, one should look below—to those in worse condition than oneself; for stimulus and incitement, to those above; but not so often above as below. This alleviates the sense of depression, and develops helpful self-satisfaction, if not always sympathy—though in the better class of natures it will develop sympathy also.

It is only imaginative troubles that grow by being dwelt on; and a very excellent recipe for not having a desired object is to believe we have it, or have an excellent substitute or compensatory advantages for it.

Napoleon was morbidly vain and sensitive on the subject of his low stature; and, no doubt, would have suffered far more than he did if he had not been able to make historical comparisons favourable to himself, which, as we read, he was wont to do. In contemplating, on one occasion, a portrait of Alexander the Great, he remarked more than once, with an air of self-congratulation, "Alexander the Great was shorter than I am, much shorter." Doubtless there was consolation to him in the thought.

Some readers may perhaps remember the anecdote of the philosopher who turned his shirt and observed, "What a comfort there

is in clean linen." Men's riches lie rather in what they are, in what they feel and believe, than in what they have; and Thoreau was certainly right, from his own point of view, when he declared that men were the slaves of their own baggage. This was his way of cheerily translating his own disadvantages into advantages; and his example forms a kind of bracing advertisement of cheerful stoicism, which may well, to some extent, be imitated.

Life's bitters give zest to the pleasures that succeed, and, if it is better to realise that Tom or Dick or Harry have from nature the advantage of us in height, or proportion, or eyes, or hair, it is our best cue to strive to surpass them in the more lasting endowments of brain and concentrated purpose, industry and application. With this programme before us, it is hardly possible we should altogether fail—since the mere effort after self-development is, in itself, a training and reward.

Life's bitters thus, too, are succeeded by and give zest to after pleasures. Thackeray, whom no English writer has surpassed in delicate observation and apt illustration of these more subtle relationships of life, has, in one of his works, the following passage:

My fair young reader, if you are not so perfect a beauty as the peerless Lindamira, Queen of the Ball; if at the end of it, as you retire to bed, you meekly own that you have had but two or three partners, whilst Lindamira has had a crowd round her all night, console yourself with thinking that, at fifty, you will look as kind and pleasant as you now do at eighteen. You will not have to lay down your coach-and-six of beauty and see another step into it, and walk yourself through the rest of life. You will have to forego no accustomed homage; you will not witness and own the depreciation of your smiles. You will not see fashion forsake your quarter; and remain, all dust, gloom and cobwebs within your once splendid saloons, with placards in your sad windows —gaunt, lonely and to let! You may not have known any grandeur, but you won't feel any desertion. You will not have enjoyed millions, but you will have escaped bankruptcy.

There is wisdom of the most practical and suggestive kind in this. It is a homily of contentment, a rubric of light-heartedness and self-satisfaction. If not calculated to inspire poetic dreams and visions, it is certain, if appropriated and acted on, to aid peaceful self-possession, composure, and that gentle patience and toleration which are admitted to do so much to preserve freshness and placid enjoyment.

ADELBERT.

A Christmas Story.

By Katherine Carr.

I.

"I have the second sight, Goethe."

"ONLY imagine, Bettine, what a tragedy if a stable-boy becomes our fate! Do you think they are both away?"

"Yes. I peeped into the kitchen, before we started, and they were eating baked apples over the fire with the servants. Hush! You must not talk."

It was a Christmas Eve in Germany: the hour, close upon midnight; the scene, nothing more nor less than a stable-door, with two girls standing there, bareheaded, and regardless of wintry blasts and the soft snow-flakes that fell silently, now and then, on their fresh young faces. They were foolish, childish and reckless, you say? No doubt. But they were also intensely happy and merry; for, at the age of eighteen, prospective colds in the head present no terrors potent enough to dispel existing pleasures.

Not that this was a wholly unmixed pleasure. The cold wind whistled shrilly round us; my nose, ears and chin were, I felt convinced, rapidly acquiring a ruby colouring that it is to be hoped was not their ordinary tint; and the black sky, with its rolling, murky clouds, and the eerie stillness, combined with the uncanny nature of our errand, tended to make me, tall and strong as I am, shiver with some slight mental nervousness.

Not so strange little Bettine. She was leaning forward eagerly, her small white face, and large eyes looking even whiter and larger than usual in the dimness, and one hand raised to her ear, as though she feared to lose the smallest sound. She was both a delight and a wonder to me, this little cousin. A delight, because of her innocent childishness, her sweet infantine face, and long flaxen plaits falling below her waist like a fair Margarita; and a wonder, because of her dreamy dark eyes, and strange, mystic visions and fantasies.

She had led me forth, this Christmas Eve, to wait at the stable-door, in hopes of receiving, according to the legend, a phantom-glimpse of the not-impossible lovers whom, girl-like, we imagined to be awaiting us in the future; and, though I was not superstitious enough to expect much revelation to myself, we have always said, half jokingly, that Bettine was gifted with second sight.

The hour of midnight sounded from the old village church, but still no lover made his appearance, nor so much as cast his shadow

before. I began to hanker after my warm bed, and felt my nose tenderly, with a faint hope that, if I went home soon, it might escape being frost-bitten.

"Come, Bettine," I whispered, "cannot you tell them to be quick? Or is it that there *are* none? At all events, I say that no spirit-lover is worth being frozen to death for; and I, for one, accept the solitary lot of a spinster without a groan."

"*Of course* they will not come if you chatter so," replied Bettine, reproachfully. "In fact, I believe we ought not even to be together. Suppose one of us goes round to the door at the other end? It is quite close, and I don't think there is anything to fear, is there?"

"Oh dear no! Very well, I will go. But only for five minutes, remember, and if something does appear to you whilst I am away, mind you don't faint or have hysterics. *I* am not afraid," I said boldly; though I must confess that, when I found myself out of sight of my companion, my heart began to thump rather violently.

I nestled close up against the stable-door, and set myself to think hard of something pleasant, to beguile those five minutes of suspense. But when I say that, quite against my will, I could think of nothing else but a certain Adelbert von Reichen, I do not mean to imply that he was a particularly agreeable subject.

On the contrary. Was it not to escape from him that I had taken refuge with my good Aunt and Uncle Stiegelbach, with the determination to forget his very existence? What if, at one time, I did, like a foolish little moth, allow myself to be dazzled by the charms of such a splendid young officer? Girls of seventeen are proverbially silly; and perhaps he was not much to blame if he had encouraged the fluttering imbecile until he was tired of it, and then, metaphorically speaking, stuck a pin into its head, and paid no more heed to it. I plead guilty to the weakness of having been an easy prey. But I am proud to be able to add that I had courage to survive the impalation, and, though forced to beat a retreat, it was an honourable one. I think Adelbert von Reichen would have been surprised, if anyone had betrayed to him how successfully he had pricked the heart of Thecla Burgos, for even a short space of time.

Of course the wound healed rapidly. When one has reached the mature age of eighteen-and-a-half, one can afford to ridicule the follies of Sweet Seventeen; and though, as I waited patiently that Christmas Eve in the dark, I could not get rid of Adelbert von Reichen's handsome face and laughing blue eyes, I was able to look upon the picture without the faintest emotion; unless, perhaps, it was one of mild anger and dislike.

Dear, dear! How cold it was! Surely the allotted five minutes were over? Never again should Bettine tempt me out on such a worthless expedition when the thermometer was almost at zero. At last, with a forlorn hope of seeing "something"—I really did not care if it proved nothing more exciting than Karl, the stable-boy—I

decided to peep into the stable, whence came a delicious odour of straw and horses, suggestive of warmth and comfort.

I had my hand on the latch, pausing a moment with an involuntary qualm, and an uneasy conviction that some one was running towards me—perhaps Bettine, also tired of waiting—when the door was flung suddenly open in my face, and a figure stood before me in the uncertain light of a dim lantern.

At the same instant a form glided up from behind, and I felt Bettine's arm flung round my waist with a tremulous nervousness that was infectious. Together we stood thus, gazing silently at the apparition, if such indeed it were.

It was the figure of a young Prussian officer; that we were told by the uniform and military cloak. He was tall, slim and good looking. Light brown hair, closely cut as it is, in soldier fashion, nevertheless managed to curl on the temples, and the bronzed forehead; and the long moustache did not conceal a well-shaped mouth that, at this moment, was smiling and showing a set of straight, white teeth. The eyes were blue and laughing; and the general expression of the face one of almost tantalising good humour and merriment.

It could have been scarcely a minute that he stood confronting us. Then, with a low bow, he passed swiftly by, the lantern was extinguished, and he had vanished into the dark night shadows.

For a moment, absurd as I knew it all to be, I could only burst into an hysterical fit of laughter. It was not until I noticed that Bettine was leaning heavily on me and trembling violently, that I realised how seriously the little scene had affected her.

"What nonsense it all is," I cried. "Why, my silly little Bettine, don't you know that it must have been a bona-fide, flesh-and-blood human man, and not a spirit after all? Spirits don't walk about with lanterns. Did it terrify you? I own that it made my heart leap to my mouth for a second. But afterwards—why, didn't you see his lips twitching and his eyes dancing? As if apparitions ever laughed! except in a hoarse, uncanny way. Oh, it is too bad! Some one has played a trick on us."

And then I laughed again, until my voice echoed through the night stillness.

"Hush!" whispered Bettine, shivering. "Let us go home quickly. I am perished with cold."

We ran home, I half supporting the silly little thing, who was unfeignedly nervous and agitated. It was not until we were safe in my bedroom, and after I had rubbed her cold hands before the fire, that some glow of warmth returned to her white cheeks, though she smiled bravely, and tried to pretend that she was not in the least frightened, but only chilled to the bone and very tired.

We had bribed old Anna, the cook, to put a little jug of mulled elderberry wine by the fire to warm us after our adventure; and after

we had comforted ourselves with the fragrant, steaming brew, Bettine's tongue unfroze.

"You did see it, Thecla?" she asked, with eager, bright eyes.

"See it? Yes. And what is more," I answered impressively, "I recognised it."

There was a moment's pause, whilst she slowly scanned my face with mystified conjecture.

"Then it was for you it came," she said suddenly, in her naïve way. "I thought—I thought ——"

"For me!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Never! As it it dared. I detest it. There! You are welcome to it for all I care. And I wish—I wish you joy of it. Popinjay!"

"But can you be sure, quite sure it was real? Who was it—he, I mean—if you are so certain?"

"Adelbert von Reichen," I answered scornfully. "Did you ever see such a dandy, such a ladies' pet, in your life?"

"I did not think so," answered Bettine simply, and knit her fair brows into a very puzzled frown, as though endeavouring to solve some question that baffled her comprehension.

I went on brushing my hair vigorously, muttering every now and then, "ridiculous," "impertinent," and similar expressions of contempt and indignation.

Presently Bettine lifted her dreamy eyes from the fire, where she had evidently been seeing visions among the glowing coals.

"And you are sure—quite sure—that it was Herr von Reichen?" she repeated.

"As sure as I can be about anything," I answered. "But what does it matter? I am sleepy, and longing to go to bed. Well, little Wonder-eyes?"

"Thecla?"

"Yes?"

"Did you see—*only one?*"

Her voice was so full of repressed excitement, that I shivered a little, and drew closer to the fire, glancing hurriedly at the window-curtains and at the dark corners of the room.

"Yes, I only saw one; and even he was a fraud—not a spirit at all."

"And I," she whispered, very low, "saw two of them."

She was leaning against my knee, and as she raised her rapt and solemn eyes to mine, I could not doubt the truth of her words, nor attempt to contradict her.

"It was only for a moment," she went on; "and it was *behind* the real one. Just a shadow, as it were—looking straight at me, Thecla, with blue eyes, like the other, but grave instead of merry. I saw it plainly; it is no use trying to persuade me that it was only fancy. It *was* there; and it looked at me as though it would come to claim me. And then I seemed to awake from a dream, and there was no one but the real Herr von Reichen, whom you know."

"What was the other one like? Exactly the same, you say?"

"Exactly. I can recollect the face perfectly; so well that I could draw it now, feature for feature."

"Ah! I see it all," I cried exultantly. "What can be plainer? I congratulate you, Bettine. He is not such a bad fellow after all, and I am in a minority in my prejudice against him. Tastes differ, you know. Now, come! You are still shivering. Let us get to bed, or we shall have no spirits for Christmas-day—merriment, I mean, not uncanny spirits of the night."

"I daresay it meant nothing," she answered musingly. "I should not think about it if there had been only one, and if it had not made me feel so strange when I saw it. A sort of terror seemed to fall upon me—a weight on my heart. I cannot explain it. Ah! well, perhaps my imagination was over-excited. But we will try our fates again, won't we, Thecla? There are our St. John's Eve roses, you remember."

"Yes. But, for my part, I dislike these freaks. They make my blood curdle; and I wager that we both have bad colds to-morrow. Good-night, little cousin; and sleep soundly, without any phantoms to worry you into a nightmare. You know, I always say that you are like the Bettine of Goethe: you have the second-sight, Tina."

The simple Christmas festivities of the Stiegelbach family seemed to me very delightful in their homely cheerfulness.

I am an only child, and though from babyhood upwards all my kind friends have combined to spoil me, my youthful pleasures had lacked some of the joyousness that belongs to a large family. My Berlin life was very happy, very contented, and fairly gay. But lately I had taken a distaste for frivolous dissipations; and the old world peace of the Stiegelbach household had an inexpressible charm for me.

There was such an infectious glow of goodwill and innocent excitement over everyone and everything this Christmas morn.

Looking out from my bedroom window I could see the quiet little village lying in the sunshine. Snow had fallen during the night, and lay in fresh, crisp whiteness under the frosty blue sky, glittering, here and there, as though lavishly strewn with diamonds. The same sparkling gems lit the snow-laden branches of the firs and pine trees; no Christmas-tree could equal them in beauty to-day. A little beyond the village, and rising in pure white splendour, were the dear old hills. Many an exploration had we had amongst their wild fastnesses during the past autumn; scrambles in search of ferns, wild flowers and mosses; and fishing expeditions with the boys, who knew all the most promising pools in the river that wound in and out of the valleys.

In some places, higher up amongst the hills, this river dashed like a torrent; and when the snows melted suddenly it overflowed its banks, and caused no little devastation in the farmsteads that stood near its course.

I am not going to mention the name of our remote little village. In the first place, you would not be much the wiser if I did; and in the second, I love it too well to run the risk of laying its tranquil beauties before the desecrating eyes of possible sight-seers and visitors.

We were a merry party at breakfast that Christmas morning; and no one noticed that I blew my nose with suspicious frequency, or that Bettine had black saucers round her eyes, and a bright pink spot on each cheek. I heard her stifling a cough now and then, when the boys' laughter was at its loudest, and then we caught each other's eyes and laughed too. I think Max, the eldest of the family, guessed something, for he muttered to me, rather scornfully:

"I suppose Bettine has been up to some pranks with her spirits, hasn't she? I believe she is a regular medium."

What a large party we made in the quaint old Kirche. My aunt and uncle in one pew, with little Erma and Friedel, and Hildegarde, with her pink cheeks and long flaxen plaits. Then Max, Hugo, Ludwig, Bettine and myself in the back pew against the wall. And how lustily the little cousins sang the well-known Christmas hymns; even Hugo, whose voice was cracked, and Friedel, whose childish treble ran sadly out of tune.

I was ashamed of myself for allowing my thoughts to wander. But I should not have been a daughter of Eve, if I had kept my eyes from roving over the church, in search of the face that had so startled me last night.

If Adelbert meant to thrust himself upon us, it was more than probable that he would come to church and way-lay us on our way out. At least, so I conjectured; and I soon found that I was right. For, just in front of us, joining in the singing with a deep, bass voice, stood Herr von Reichen, no spectre, but a very living and stalwart human being.

I was too proud to look often towards him, for fear he should mistake curiosity for pleasure. But whenever I did slowly glance in his direction, I found that he was looking towards us; not at me, but at Bettine.

No wonder. She was like the picture of some fair girl-saint, with pure, earnest face and devotional eyes. I do not believe that for one moment during the service her thoughts came earthwards. There were times when one felt that she soared above the rest of us, and that her heart was in heaven, storing up fresh purity and sweetness. I used to wonder why the angels did not keep her there altogether; though, to be sure, we needed her here far more than they could do.

It is true that we sometimes laughed at her rather unmercifully for her strange fancies. She had always been of a sensitive, highly-strung nature; and her delight in poring over fairy tales and legends, and stories of magic or the supernatural, had probably over-stimulated her imagination. Nevertheless I believe also that she had, in some

degree, a sense which the rest of us did not possess; and I still believe it; otherwise, I should never have been persuaded to relate this little story. For I tell you plainly, at the outset, that you will hear one or two facts which may tax your credulity a good deal, and for which I cannot undertake to give psychological explanations, as a cleverer person might do; but I can vouch for the truth of them, and that in the recital there will be no attempt at exaggeration.

No sooner was service over than Max rushed to Herr von Reichen, greeted him warmly as an old friend, and had introduced him to the rest of us before we could recover from our surprise.

When he shook hands with Bettine, she blushed like a rose, then pursed up her lips, feeling, I am sure, very cross with herself. Blushes come at such odd, inconvenient moments, often when there is no reason for them at all. I gave way to no such weakness. On the contrary, I looked Adelbert over as though I did not see him, and gave him the tips of my fingers.

He told us he was here on business, though what business he could have in such an out-of-the-way place I could not imagine. And when he said that he was lodging at the primitive little inn, of course hospitable Aunt Hulda insisted on his becoming her guest for as long as he liked.

Max profusely seconded the invitation. He felt there was some importance in having a friend older than himself, who had seen the world, and was a smart young officer from Berlin. So that there was nothing for Adelbert to do but to accept, which he did with a very good grace.

When Bettine and I were alone together, we could only look at each other and laugh.

"Oh, I do hope and trust he does not recognise us," said Bettine. "It was very dark last night. He may have thought we were servant girls."

"Let us hope so. Not that he will be indiscreet," I said. "He is a gentleman; that much I will say for him. But what in the name of wonder is he doing in this part of the world?"

For reply, Bettine took hold of both my arms, looking straight into my eyes, with a saucy smile on her lips.

"What, indeed?" she said, in soft mockery. "It is very difficult to find a reason, is it not, Thecla?"

"Very," I answered crossly; "I have not the faintest idea."

I knew what she meant to insinuate; but it was so ridiculously untrue that it vexed me that she should imagine anything of that kind.

"If you watch us," I said, "you will see that we do nothing but quarrel. He wants constant snubbing and keeping in order. But mind, Bettine, you are not to go by my opinion. The world—that is, Berlin society—says he is a hero, an Adonis—Sigurd himself. And, you know, the world always knows best."

"Are you surprised to see me here? At all events, you do not seem glad, Thecla."

It was the first time I had spoken alone with Adelbert. Now, having found me in my snug retreat in the window recess, he had quietly seated himself by my side.

"I am surprised," I answered, laying down my book with an ill-concealed yawn. "Whatever brings you here?"

"When heartless beauties take it into their capricious heads to retreat from the world, they must expect a few satellites to follow," he said, with a short laugh; "that is all. And here is the first of them."

"Nonsense," I said impatiently. "When you do invade quiet, unaffected country villages, you should learn to avoid society commonplaces. Why *are* you here?"

"On business. Does that satisfy you?"

"Business! Herr Adelbert von Reichen wasting the sunshine of his presence in these wilds for the sake of business? Oh, ye gods! What wonder portendeth? Adelbert von Reichen and business! Why the terms are incompatible. As well talk of a butterfly storing honey."

"Mocking as ever, I see," he answered with imperturbable good humour. "Laugh away; it is wholesome; and I like to be of use, if only as a medicinal."

"A duel!" I went on, with a sudden inspiration. "How stupid of me not to guess. Having killed your best friend, you are here in concealment, until the excitement has died out. Yet you have not one scar yourself. That speaks in itself for your drawing-room courage."

"Not even a duel. Nothing but the two reasons I have given you," he said, indifferent to my jeers. "If you don't believe me, well and good; I can survive it. But I can even explain my business. The father of one of my brother officers owns some property near here. It is some old rickety castle, among the hills, I believe, and uninhabitable on account of the floods from the river. As a lively Christmas holiday old Herr Ansdell ordered his son to come here and examine the place, to see if it could be restored or turned to any use. Hermann happens to be in love, and unable to tear himself from Berlin. Therefore I, having no such pressing attachments, and rather enjoying the change, offered my services; and here I am. I met your cousin Max at Heidelberg last year, but I did not expect to be welcomed into such a delightful family circle as this. Your aunt and uncle are like characters out of an old-fashioned novel. And as for Fräulein Bettine! What is she made of?"

"All that's nice. Cannot you see that?"

"When first I saw her in church she looked so pretty, with her eyes downcast, that I longed to kiss her. When she raised her eyes, I shuddered to think of such sacrilege. She looks half a child, half a saint, and makes one rather careful of one's manners, I think. Shall I like her?"

"Everyone loves Bettine—liking does not express it. Be nice to her, Adelbert. She is too good to be treated like other girls. You might hurt her."

I looked at him meaningly, for I knew him too intimately to be afraid of saying exactly what I thought. We had known each other long enough to be on terms where Christian names are used as a matter-of-course. Perhaps that is why he had—— Well, never mind; that is all over now.

"It is easy enough for *you* to talk," he said, flushing with annoyance; "and, because you know yourself to be wrong, to twit me with being to blame. I am no Lothario. Thank goodness! I can find better amusements. Flirtation is a woman's sport, and one which you, at least, evidently find as easy as it is amusing. I only regret that I was ever such a fool as to believe in you."

I was so startled by his unchallenged vehemence that I had no answer ready before he left me to join the children, who were telling stories in the firelight with Bettine and Aunt Hulda.

Presently a chorus of delight rose from them; and, crossing over to join the group, I found that it was caused by hearing that their visitor's business was in connection with the old Wiener Schloss at the foot of the hills. They had always longed to explore it; but the aged keeper was of so taciturn a disposition that neither love nor money had ever gained them admission. Now, at last, they could defy him.

"I will take you all there, and introduce you to the ghosts," said Adelbert. "It will be perfect weather for sleighing after another fall of snow."

"There are brigands, you know, and ghosts, and an enchanted princess, and a hero who is going to rescue her," said little Friedel, with round, awe-struck eyes. "There are; Bettine said so. Didn't you, Bettine?"

"Not now, Friedel. That was long ago. But perhaps," she added, glancing shyly at Adelbert, "Herr von Reichen means to be the hero, and will find a princess, if he looks for her."

"I shall look for her," said Adelbert, looking back into her eyes, with curious earnestness; "I hope I shall find her."

After a day or two Adelbert was indeed quite a hero to the Stiegelbachs, old and young. The fuss they made over him was ridiculous, and enough to turn his head, if he had not been used to adulation all his life.

I must admit that, as young men go, he was not outrageously conceited. He had charming manners to my aunt and the children, kept the boys in constant merriment, and fairly delighted my uncle by his more intellectual qualities. For myself, I began to relent towards him, and thought I had not been so hopelessly silly when I was seventeen.

And, as for Bettine, I believe she fell in love with him at first sight. Not that I guessed it at the time, for she made no sign; nor was there anything in Adelbert's manner towards her to justify my fears lest he should trifle with her. In fact, thinking over it all now, I see that I wronged him in this. It was only because I was so very young that I had made myself a baby about him that winter in Berlin.

That was a very happy Christmas week; but if I linger over it, we shall never reach the end of my reminiscence.

For three days it snowed as though it would never leave off.

But we were never dull. We used to romp in the schoolroom with the children, and fill the days with music and singing and delightful talks. Then, in the dusk, we would assemble round the fire, and roast chestnuts and tell stories. How Adelbert made us laugh, or creep, just as he chose; and how well he adapted himself to the old-world simplicity of our life.

When the storm had passed, there never was such weather for sleighing. We took it in turns to go out in Uncle Stiegelbach's two sleighs; whilst those who stayed at home had plenty to do preparing for the New Year's Eve festivities. There was to be a dance on that night. Every spare room in the house was to be filled, and guests were invited from miles round. We all gave our assistance in decorating the ballroom, smartening the children's frocks, or even in working in the still-room. For though the Stiegelbachs are well off, they live in the simplest fashion, and are not above helping themselves. Aunt Hulda says it is good discipline for the girls, and makes them better wives and mothers in the future.

II.

"Now, Bettine, quick! You understand it all. What does it mean? O, do, do, do say I am going to be a general with lots of medals."

Thus Ludwig, hovering in company with half-a-dozen eager young faces, over a great basin half filled with water.

The boiling lead had just been poured into it, and now Bettine, the family soothsayer, was called upon to translate the mystic meaning traced by the molten metal.

We had abandoned the visitors to Aunt Hulda, and betaken ourselves to the schoolroom to consult the New Year's Eve oracles concerning our respective futures. Adelbert alone out of the guests was privileged with an invitation to our revels; and I am afraid he rather destroyed the solemn decorum by construing ridiculous meanings out of everything.

Bettine did not quite approve of the levity. She looked on these games with such intense earnestness that it hurt her feelings to hear them spoken of with disrespect. Not that, as a rule, she thoroughly

believed in her own fortune-telling. It was only now and then that "the spirit moved her," as she expressed it, and seemed to teach her instinctively what she had not known before.

She managed to find in the mystic scroll a general's hat for Ludwig, a coronet and inexhaustible wealth for Hildegarde, and an ideal farm for Erma. All this was purely inventive; but I could see that her imagination was becoming excited, her eyes dreamy, and her voice faint and far away. She was so absorbed that she did not in the least understand why we all laughed when she prophesied for me, "a roving life, full of change. I think," with a puzzled frown, "rather a bad life—it all seems so shaky and giddy. That's all. And a very small grave."

Adelbert's turn came next. By this time she was quite lifted out of herself, and, after the first few words, she no longer looked into the basin, but dreamily into his eyes, reading his future, as it were, from his character, with an unconsciousness that was very impressive, in a strange, unnatural way.

"You will have struggles, but you will conquer," she said slowly. "There is some kind of honour waiting for you at the end—and always, by your side, there is a figure of light helping you on. At first you are parted from it; but soon you join hands, and so you go on together, hand in hand, until I can see no more."

As she spoke, Adelbert looked away from her, straight at me. His bronzed face had flushed a little; he held his head high, and in his eyes there was the expression of one who *meant* to conquer. I do not know what else was there, for my own eyes fell, and I began to tremble, as I used to do when I was seventeen.

Bettine's own fortune was the only one left to be told. I was glad the little farce was over, for as the hot lead fell with a hiss into the water, I could see that the sensitive brain was strung to its utmost. The great eyes gleamed, like burning coals, out of the small white face; her fingers were nervously interlaced, and her breath came quickly through the parted lips.

For some minutes she did not speak; and when she did, her voice was low and uncertain.

"There is so little in this," she faltered; "I do not understand—it comes to an end so suddenly. Only a silver path, without a flaw. Then a little cross, like an angel with outstretched wings. And then, a shining spot upon the path—and after that—I cannot read it—I cannot understand. O, what is it? Not the end? Not the end?" she cried, a little wildly, with something like a sob. "Suppose it should be—*that?*"

"How can you let her go on?" exclaimed Adelbert. "She will kill herself with it, poor child." And, springing forward, he placed one hand over her eyes, and with the other arm supported her gently, until her excitement was a little calmed.

"It is all a pack of rubbish," he said cheerfully. "I don't believe

a word of it. Everyone reads exactly what he or she likes. Now, to tell the truth, if *I* look in there, by searching very hard, and half shutting my eyes, I can make out something like a pig without any legs, and perhaps *something* like an exceedingly ugly face, with a long nose and no chin. Do you suppose that is meant for your future, Fräulein Bettine? Because, if so, I read it thus: you will marry a farmer, and look after pigs, and be a very plain old woman. Do any of you believe in the likelihood?"

Upon which we laughed, relieved at the brighter turn of affairs; and I carried off Bettine, to rest before the coming evening festivities.

She was still nervous and subdued; but my own spirits were too buoyant not to infect her in some measure, and presently she was laughing gaily, and even joining me in an impromptu ballet round the room, looking, in her little white petticoat, like a child of twelve.

It was an odd way of resting, perhaps, but I knew that it was her brain more than her body that was overtaxed; and what I hoped was to be able to keep her mind away from dangerous subjects, more especially from the recollection of the faded roses we had been keeping, in silver paper, ever since last St. John's Eve. Tradition said that if we wore them on New Year's Eve our future husbands would come to fetch them. Not that either of us desired such useless encumbrances; but we looked upon them as necessary evils, and they served as an excuse to dabble in the supernatural.

But my precautions were unsuccessful. I was just putting the finishing touch to my hair, and surveying myself critically in the looking-glass, when the tiresome little creature danced up behind me, and peeping over my shoulder, waved in my face my faded old crimson rose.

"No escape," she laughed. "It is a whim of mine that you should wear it. I prophesy that you will no longer have it when the dance is over. Is it likely? Oh, Thecla, to think that you have been to all those grand Berlin balls, and that no one has captured you yet. How did you manage it, you beautiful, cold-hearted creature? I am ashamed of you. But to-night! Tell me, Thecla," and she looked wistfully up into my face: "is there no one—*no one* coming here to-night for you?"

"No one will look at me whom *I* care to see," I answered enigmatically. "As for this horrid old rose—take it away."

"No, no. Please wear it. Just to satisfy me. See! I have pinned it under the real flowers, so that no one will notice it who does not look for it. Mine is in the same place. What is the harm?"

"None; if you would not treat it so seriously. But when you go and talk of spectres, and visions, and all that, as you did on Christmas Eve, it is *horrid*."

"I am very sorry; I cannot help it. Of course you think me very silly," she said humbly. "But just the last few days I seem to have had some strange presentiment—I cannot tell of what; and I have such vivid dreams that I cannot forget them in the daytime. Somehow, I feel certain that something is going to happen in my life."

"So there is—perhaps," I said, putting my arms round her and kissing the now blushing cheeks. "Ah, Bettine! Little Wonder-eyes! There is no need to tell me what ails you."

She was in love, as only a simple-hearted, innocent child can be; full of soft tremors of expectation, of unconfessed hopes and fears; hesitating on the threshold of a new world, where, to her guileless eyes, everything shimmered in the tender glamour of a silvery love-light.

She was very pretty and gay that night, and danced away with untired feet and shining eyes, as happy as a bird.

I was at first amused by the novelty of this little provincial ball; but after a time I wearied of my bourgeois partners, and longed for a valse with Adelbert, whose step had always suited mine to perfection.

But he paid no attention whatever to me. I saw him dance twice with Bettine; but the rest of the time he did his duty by his hostess, and exerted himself to entertain the young women from the country-side, with their flat waists and broad, beaming faces.

"Not that I care," I said to myself indifferently; "it is nothing to me. Dear little Bettine! If only that would come off. Why not?"

I was resting by myself on a sofa at one end of the long room, in a kind of recess that was only dimly lit by a shaded light. It was cool and comfortable there, and I was left for a little while alone, until Bettine came and flung herself by my side.

"Oh, I am so tired," she said; "I really must rest for a few minutes. How lazy you are, Thecla. But we must not exhaust ourselves too soon; it is not twelve o'clock yet. We will sit here together and welcome the New Year. Why, where is your rose?"

"Here," I answered, pointing to where she had placed it. But it was not there. I grew quite hot and red with annoyance, when her laughing eyes noted the fact. "Well," I added, "it is no matter. I suppose it fell out and has met its fate under the clumping heels of half-a-hundred excited beaux. I am glad to be rid of it. And yours, Bettine?"

"Quite safe, and likely to remain so. Poor, ugly old thing."

We were silent for a little while. Suddenly it struck me that we were peculiarly so. Before us were the dancers, the lights, the music. Only just close around us seemed to hang an oppressive stillness and silence. I did not feel faint. My brain was perfectly clear, and though I shook my head to make sure that I was not sinking asleep, still that stifling hush and sense of mystery seemed to fall over me. I glanced at Bettine. She was leaning back against the

sofa. Her colour had flown, but there was a smile on her lips and a dreamy ecstasy in her half-closed eyes. Involuntarily I shuddered and caught my breath.

At that instant the old grandfather's clock in the hall sounded the solemn strokes that proclaimed the birth of a New Year.

One—two—three—four——

Would they never cease? Their long, slow chime sounded, to my surging brain, like the muffled tones of a funeral bell from a far distance.

Bettine was leaning forward now. The red had rushed back to her cheeks, and in eyes and lips and in her whole attitude beamed a sudden joyful delight that startled me. She had taken her faded yellow rose from her breast, and was holding it out with one hand as though giving it to one who begged for it.

My eyes followed hers, and then I understood it all.

Adelbert stood before her, looking down on her with a smile, and holding out his hand to receive the tendered flower. I saw him plainly. I could have touched him had I chosen, he stood so close. But merely for the briefest, most fleeting moment. The next I saw that, instead of Adelbert, it was only a shadow in his form; instead of Adelbert's handsome, sunburnt face, a spectral vision that faded slowly away before my eyes, like Adelbert, indeed, but as he might look upon his death-bed, wrapped in his shroud.

One instant it was there—no more. Then my head swam. I was conscious of awaking, as from a dream, to the sound of gay voices welcoming the New Year, to music, and the glare of gaslight. And there was Adelbert, bending over me, and asking me brightly if I would dance with him.

"Oh, yes, yes," I said; "only take me away from here. It is too horrible. Come away, Bettine—come."

She did not answer. And, turning to rouse her, I found that she had fainted.

III.

Next day neither Bettine nor I alluded to what had occurred the previous night. I deemed it wiser not to tell her that I, too, had had a curious hallucination, afraid that the knowledge would only heighten her nervous alarm. But I repeated the story to Aunt Hulda, suggesting that there must be something wrong with Bettine's nerves that a doctor could, perhaps, easily cure. "I think nothing of my share in it," I added. "My nerves are robust enough. But Bettine must have communicated some of her own feelings to me. One often hears of that kind of magnetic influence."

"She is not strong; and she reads too much," said Aunt Hulda. "Otherwise, she is perfectly sound in mind and body. I will see that she has plenty of distractions to keep her away from her books for the present. She has always been a strange little thing. It comes

of being a Sabbath child. It is said that all children born on a Sunday have the second sight. Not that I believe it. And, though I look upon you as a sensible girl, Thecla, I am inclined to think that what you saw last night was pure fancy."

I was, and am still, unable to agree with her.

I am not by any means a credulous person, and oftener than not scoff at stories of the supernatural. But I do believe that at rare moments, and in exceptional cases, a veil is lifted, and that as our souls dominate for the time being over our minds and bodies, we are permitted a momentary glance at some picture that is sent perhaps as a warning of future events. At such times, when memory and the ordinary machinery of the mind are in temporary abeyance, it is not unreasonable to suppose that our soul-vision, freed from its usual fetters, should penetrate into those unknown realms, spoken of vaguely as the Supernatural. The ancients firmly believed in such visions. It is only our modern cut-and-dried philosophy that is too proud to give credence to anything that cannot be brought down to the prosaic dead level of science.

I confess that I tortured myself a little by wondering what our strange vision-hallucination, or whatever it was, signified. It might mean a warning of death to either Adelbert, Bettine, or myself. Probably to Adelbert, for whom Bettine and I would mourn in mutual grief. Or, why death at all? Why not merely the shattering of a love-dream? For instance, *supposing*—only supposing—I had been fond of Adelbert, would not his marriage with Bettine leave me with only the ghost of an old attachment? But I was not in love—far from it; since my private hope was that he would marry Bettine; so that theory was of no use. Altogether, the riddle was beyond me, and I gave up attempting to find a solution.

Two evenings after the ball Bettine and I were sitting in the window-recess of the drawing-room with the children. The lights had not yet been brought in, and we had drawn up the blind that we might look out into the dim winter twilight. Bettine had been telling a fairy-tale about a little snow princess who dwelt on the mountain-top and fell in love with the pale moon that cast its cold light over the twilit world, as it was doing now.

When the story was finished, we were silent. Erma had fallen asleep on my lap, and Friedel was tracing star-patterns on the frosty window-pane. Adelbert had stolen quietly to my side; but I did not speak to him, for fear of disturbing Bettine. I wished him to see how pretty she looked in the dusk, and to hear her recite one of the weird poems she loved.

"Go on," said Friedel, prettily. "More, please."

Always obedient to the behest of her little brother, Bettine, after a moment's reverie, began one of Heine's well-known songs, "Taking the Bride Home."

With her fair hair, and the dark eyes shining out of her small, white face, she looked like a moon-spirit herself, who might suddenly vanish from us into the twilight shadows. As she recited the second verse, there was a thrill of passion in her voice that reminded me, in some vague way, of our New Year's Eve experiences.

> "Away from me, ye gloomy man!
> Who bid thee hither come?
> Thy hand's like ice, thine eye glows bright,
> Thy breath is burning, thy cheek is white;
> But I would rather my time beguile
> With smell of roses and sun's sweet smile."

"So would we all," I broke in. "Sensible bride! If I had my way, the world would be all roses and sunshine and music."

"With you for its Queen?" suggested Adelbert. "I daresay a good many people wish the same. For myself, I maintain that it is not such a bad place as it is. One must take it the right way, and see how much amusement one can get out of it. I am sure that sentiment is allowable at Christmas-time. And to prove that Frau Stiegelbach agrees with me, she has just been planning an expedition to the Wiener Schloss before the snow melts."

There came a chorus of delight. "When?—How?—Who will take us?—How soon may we go?" cried the children.

"Patience. We are to have two expeditions. The first is to take place to-morrow, and from it you troublesome children are to be excluded. We old wiseacres are to go there first to explore, and see that there are no ogres about," said Adelbert. "We are to have the two sleighs, and Max and I are to be entrusted with the care of you, Fräulein Bettine, and Thecla. We must drive there by the upper road, as the lower one is scarcely safe at this time of year. I am afraid it does look rather like a thaw."

"Then we shall run a chance of being washed away, Schloss and all, in a flood," I remarked. "That would be very romantic.—Bye-the-bye, Adelbert, how is your *business* progressing? You are really emaciated from overwork."

"I am not sure," he answered. "At present, it has progressed very little. But I mean to be slow and sure, like the tortoise. It is worth a good deal of patience, as you may acknowledge when you understand what it is."

"How mysterious you are! As if *business* existed for you! I should like for once to see you thoroughly in earnest, to see what effect it would have on you."

"I am very thoroughly in earnest," he said, rather shortly. "Not that I expect you to believe me. If you tried, you could not see anything but the frivolous side of things. It is against your principles.

"He is in love!" I thought, exultantly. "Bravo, Bettine! If he

does not woo and win you before Twelfth Night, my name is not Thecla Burgos."

Then, like the very embodiment of discretion, I left the two to gaze at each other by moonlight, and ran upstairs to my room.

I think the ball must have upset my nerves, for my head ached so violently that I was obliged to shed a few foolish tears to relieve it, which is a folly to which I am but little addicted. I was always told that I laughed so much, that by the time I was twenty-five I should have worn out my risible faculties, and have nothing left but tears.

Nothing in this world is so bashful and self-conscious as a pair of unconfessed lovers. Out of pure shyness, both Adelbert and Bettine went through every conceivable manœuvre to avoid driving together to the Wiener Schloss the next day, though of course they would have been intensely disappointed if their obvious little stratagem had succeeded. But I settled the question by quickly jumping into Max's sleigh; and, seizing the reins, drove off before anyone had time to interfere.

"Madcap!" exclaimed Max. "Do you want to upset us?"

"No, stupid boy. You ought to be flattered at my eagerness for your society. You do not deserve it, for you look as cross as a bear. Why grudge those two poor, dear foolish people their happiness?"

Max grinned from ear to ear, and chuckled to himself. Something had evidently tickled his sense of humour.

"He is a good fellow," he jerked out presently, signifying Adelbert by a backward flip of his whip. "A real good fellow."

"Capital," I assented. "Everyone says so."

"A splendid looking fellow, too; eh?"

"Handsome as Adonis. Everyone says that too."

"But don't you think so yourself, Thecla?"

"I should not be a woman if I did not adore him," I replied, with mock rapture, and turned the conversation into a channel of less thrilling interest than the well-worn eulogies of Adelbert von Reichen.

We had a long, cold drive over the soft white snow; on one side of us the hills, on the other dark pine woods, and here and there a glimpse of the river flowing, cold and green, between white fields of desolate bleakness. By the time we arrived at the little farm near the Schloss, where the good-tempered farmer's wife was to provide us with luncheon, our appetites were fully prepared to do justice to her smoking viands. And whilst we regaled ourselves in the clean, warm kitchen, she discoursed to us on the beauties of the Schloss, on its former splendour and legends, and on her fears that the old place would soon be undermined by the river.

The thaw had begun last night, and was doing its work rapidly. From the farm-kitchen we could hear the river rushing down the valley, like a caged animal suddenly set at large.

The Wiener Schloss stood about a hundred yards from the farm, and we looked straight down on the river, which we could see rolling below us like a torrent over the rocky precipice and rushing onward with mighty force, swollen far over its banks. The terrace went sheer down into the water; and it was no wonder the owner feared every day to hear that the floods had weakened the old walls, and brought the whole place tumbling into the valley. At one end the stones had already given way here and there, so that there seemed to be nothing to prevent that portion from tottering to destruction.

In the Schloss itself there did not appear to be much to look at after all. It was chiefly interesting from its age, and from the mediæval air that hung about it. One could picture it peopled with barons and knights in clanging armour, who would toss off goblet after goblet of Rhenish wine in the old dining-hall, and then, none the worse for their carouse, dance till morning with stately dames and lovely maidens.

I had never seen Bettine in such high spirits. She laughed and chattered, and danced about the great empty rooms with quite irrepressible glee. I took all the credit to myself for the discretion I had displayed that morning; and my suspicions received confirmation by something she said when we happened to be alone for a moment.

"Thecla," she whispered, flying up to me with shining bright eyes, "I think he loves me. Oh, I am so happy."

I could not answer. But I kissed her, with a sudden rush of affection, on both her soft cheeks; then Max joined us, and there was no time for more to be said.

We next explored the dungeons—gloomy cells that made one's blood curdle, as one thought of the poor wretches who had been confined there.

"I should not care to be left alone here, even now," I remarked to Adelbert, who was by my side. "One can hear the roar of the river quite plainly as it washes against the walls."

"I shall certainly advise Herr Ansdell to give up all hopes of restoration," he answered; "it is as unsafe as can be. I hardly care to be here on a day like this. That terrace is on its last legs."

"Horrible! Let us join the others. Where are they? I wish they would not take such a pleasure in hiding from us."

"Yes," answered Adelbert, with a peculiar laugh; "I notice that you like to stick to Max like a burr."

Which remark being rude, I did not answer it, but groped on through the low, dark cells as fast as I could.

Bettine had hidden herself away, and dragged Max after her. I felt rather cross. I did not care to be left with a lover who was sighing for his beloved. But the farther we groped, the more confused we became; and to my repeated calls there came no answer except the irritating echoes.

"We looked straight down on the river, which we could see rolling below us like a torrent over the rocky precipice and rushing onwards with mighty force, swollen far over its banks."

"Here is a door," exclaimed Adelbert at last, pushing open a heavy door on rusty hinges in the wall. "Ah! that's it. There is a passage of some sort. I think it is all right; but perhaps you had better wait here whilst I explore a little."

I did not much like the arrangement. The moment he had turned the corner, and was out of sight, I began to hear sounds that filled me with vague terrors. Through the walls I heard the rushing of the river, whilst with its muffled roar mingled a dull, heavy rumble, that rolled nearer and nearer. The very floor upon which I stood seemed to shake and quiver.

I could bear it no longer. Letting the door fly to behind me, I sprang down the steps leading into the passage, and darted after Adelbert, my feet winged by girlish apprehension.

Once round the corner, I could see that the passage led on for some distance. Probably Adelbert had run on to the end, and we should meet as he returned. This proved to be the case. A moment or two later he came hurrying towards me, and, catching hold of his arm with a sense of security, I exclaimed:

"Let us get out of this, Adelbert. No—not that way. Nothing shall induce me to go back into those dungeons. I believe the whole place is coming down about our ears."

"We *must* go back. This is evidently an unused passage in the terrace wall. It leads out close to the river, and there is no way into safety there. Come on, Thecla. It is no use talking here. We must find our way out of those abominable dungeons somehow or other. Quick."

There was nothing for it but to take his advice. Yet, with those horrible sounds in front of us, it seemed like running straight into danger.

Suddenly he stopped, and held up his hand in warning.

"Hang it," he muttered below his breath; "we are beaten."

As he spoke there came a crash of falling masonry, as if the world were coming to an end. He seized my hand, and we ran as fast as we could towards the other exit from the passage that led into the open air. Once there, I paused an instant to regain my breath.

"The terrace has given way," I panted; "we are in a nice pickle."

"Nonsense," he said sharply; "we are safe enough."

"No, we are not," I answered quietly. "You are frightened as well as I. Men always lose their tempers when they are frightened. I am not a baby. What are we to do next?"

"Get out of this somehow."

"Yes; but how? The river is rising every minute."

To realise our position, it must be understood that this east end of the terrace joined on to an inaccessible precipice that in old days of warfare had been a true rock of defence to the Schloss. The passage running along the base of the terrace led to a sheltered walk under this rock, with the river flowing about forty yards from it.

Doubtless, in ordinary times, this walk was picturesque enough,

but under the present circumstances, its beauty was eclipsed by its danger. The swollen river almost reached over the path; in a little while it would do so entirely. Already it had risen to the foot of the rock, where, some fifty yards from where we stood, it jutted out like a sharp barrier.

Our predicament was an awkward one. On one side the high, perpendicular rock; on the other, the rushing flood; behind us, masses of crumbling and falling stone; in front, the murderous river sweeping by on its wild course.

Adelbert's keen eyes noted our last slight hope of escape.

Scooped out in the rock, about five feet from the ground, was a curious little roughly-hewn alcove, probably once used as a post of outlook.

One or two rugged steps led up to it; and here, for a time, one would be out of danger, though in an hour or so the water would probably reach even there.

"Come," said Adelbert; "we may as well keep dry whilst we can. At all events, if we stay near the wall we shall stand the risk of being buried alive. You need not be afraid. A little patience is all we want."

He hoisted me, by aid of the steps, on to the seat in the rock. It was not made of roses, but, at such a time, one must be thankful for small mercies.

"My only fear is that you will catch cold," said Adelbert, with affected carelessness. "They will guess what has happened, and help us somehow or other. Meantime, we must make the best of it, and I am not sorry to have a talk with you, Thecla. We used to find that the time flew by pretty quickly last year when we were together in Berlin."

"But see how quickly the river is rising. It will soon touch your feet. You must try and get up here, Adelbert."

"I can stand on the highest step, if it gets much worse. Don't bother about me. What a plucky little thing you are, Thecla."

Presently he climbed on to the first step. Looking down, I saw that the turbid water was lapping the foot of the rock, and my heart sank. We had shouted until we were hoarse. Still, there came no token of help.

"Could not you swim into safety?" I asked presently.

"In this torrent? No. One would be whirled away, and dashed to pieces amongst those blocks of floating ice. I should not care to try it."

"Yet I am sure you would do it if I were not here. Oh, Adelbert, do leave me."

"And drown myself? Not I. We are all right here. Never fear."

It was beginning to get dark already. In the fading light we could see the wide-spreading waters whirling madly on their career of destruction. An awe-struck pause had fallen between us. Adelbert broke it by saying suddenly:

"There is something I should like to tell you, Thecla. May I?"

"I know," I answered quickly. "You love Bettine. I have always wished it, Adelbert. She is an angel. If you had sought the world over you could not have found anyone better."

"Bettine ——"

He paused. Then added: "You are always honest, Thecla. Are you glad? Really glad?"

"With all my heart," I said; though, at that moment, my heart was quivering as though a knife had pierced it.

Silence once more. Adelbert had climbed on to the second step, and was leaning near me against the rock. Now at last, in this solemn moment, I mocked myself no longer, and knew what had ailed me these last few days. A great tear fell from my eyes on to his hand.

"Thecla? What, crying? You are frightened, and no wonder," he cried tenderly. "Would to God I could do something for you."

"No. I am not afraid," I said, trying to smile. "Whilst there is life there is hope, as the doctors say. Do not worry about me. Of course I see what is coming; tears will not stop it. I do not mind; not so very much. It is far harder for you and Bettine. So hard that I *know* help will come."

"Bettine!" he said, impatiently. "Always Bettine."

After that he looked up at me with some strong emotion in his face; and, for a moment, our eyes met and burnt into each other's in the dimness. It was as though a veil was suddenly rent between us, so that we saw each other, for the first time, face to face.

"Thecla," he cried passionately, "are you always going to turn from me? Here, now, when there can be no longer any excuse to fence with the truth, I must have an answer. I must speak to you. I love you, Thecla."

His arms were round me, his face raised to mine. And then I bent down and let my lips meet his, and my hands went out in a passion of love, to rest on the brown head uplifted towards me.

"God bless you," he whispered. "My Snow Queen, won at last. Do you recognise this?" he added, drawing a little faded rose from his breast. "I knew it was a good omen. It was a ruse, but you will forgive that. When you were dancing with Max, he had the audacity to drop it close to me. You little know what a conspirator Max is. Did you suppose that nocturnal meeting in the stable yard on Christmas Eve was accidental? Credulous little goose! And now?"

"Oh," I said, with a sob that would not be repressed; "it *must* come right. If not, we are at least together; there is comfort in that. Oh, Adelbert, I am not half worthy of you. I have tried so *hard* to hate you."

"And did not succeed? Thank you, Thecla. You must never try that again. And if—well—if this is to be the end, we have each other. Nothing can matter much if we are together."

So with his arms round me, and my head bent until it almost

rested next to his, we waited for the end, whilst the cruel, chill waters flowed past with gathering roar.

The new knowledge that was between us gave a tender solemnity to what would otherwise have been so bitter. If we were to die—why, we would die together. Why should we dread the hereafter, the great unknown? We should be but a little nearer to the light, a little nearer to the Great Protector.

And yet, Oh what a glad cry broke from my lips when at last I saw a boat coming towards us through the gathering gloom! In it were the figures of a man and a girl. I guessed at once that they were Max and Bettine, who were risking their lives to save ours.

They let themselves drift down with the stream, keeping as close as possible to the cliff to avoid the current and the blocks of ice and débris that were being swept along with it. Once round the arm of rock that jutted out beyond the cliff, they would be sheltered more or less from the fury of the main stream; and when I saw that this was successfully accomplished, I breathed a sigh of relief.

A few more vigorous strokes brought them to where we were waiting for them. Max flung a rope to Adelbert, lest the flow of the water should sweep the boat too quickly past. Once *below* us, all efforts to return to our rescue would be useless. But Adelbert had foreseen this emergency, and was prepared for it. Standing on the narrow step, and supporting himself against the rock, he lifted me in his arms, ready the instant the boat passed to lower me into it.

"And you?" I had time to whisper. "I *will* not leave you, Adelbert. Swear that you will save yourself too."

"Don't be afraid. I see the boat: it is heavy and cumbersome, but as safe as possible. I can easily jump in after I have put you down. It will bear my weight perfectly. Thank God for this! We shall never be able to show our gratitude to Max and Bettine. She is the bravest little thing in the world."

"Now! Steady," shouted Max, as the critical moment arrived. "Ah! There. I have her. That's right. Bravo! Bravo!"

It was all over. How, I hardly realised in the terrible anxiety of the moment. But almost before I was aware, I found myself by Bettine's side in the stern of the boat, whilst Adelbert was rowing in her place.

I seized Bettine's hands and kissed them over and over again, crying incoherently that I could never repay her, that she was too good and brave and sweet for this world.

"There was not much danger," she said, leaning against me, completely exhausted after the strain upon her slender strength; "and we guessed how it was, when we heard part of the terrace give way. Then Max heard you call, and we were certain. There was no one within sight or hearing. We had to get the ferry-boat ourselves; it was safely tied out of reach of the river, just beyond the rock. Now we are almost safe I am not afraid. Are you?"

"Not now. Oh, Bettine! What a heroine you are."

The chief peril was, in fact, over. We had only to let ourselves float along by the terrace wall. Once beyond that we should find an easy landing on the grassy slope. Our only fear was that we might be overtaken by some of the masses of floating timber and ice.

We were close to our haven of refuge now. A few more strokes and all danger would be past. I breathed a prayer of thankfulness and squeezed Bettine's hand. She smiled back faintly, looking very tired and fragile now that there was no longer any necessity to exert herself.

Then I glanced at Adelbert, and my hopes fell a little. There was a look of anxiety in his keen eyes, a determined setting of his teeth for some desperate effort, that warned me of coming peril. He spoke a few hurried words to Max; then they both bent their backs to their oars, and pulled with all the strength they could summon. The bow of the boat was already on a line with the end of the terrace; another instant and we should be beyond it, and then——

Then a crash, a quivering shock, a surge of cold, blinding water, and a sensation of horrible terror and despair.

But it was over very quickly. Adelbert had caught me in his arms, and dragged me, very wet, startled and frightened, on to dry land. Then he sprang back into the water to the aid of Max and Bettine. Had the shock occurred a minute sooner it would have been fatal.

As it happened, we had upset close to the landing place, so that to a good swimmer the danger was not great.

But Max was not a good swimmer. His sister hung, a dead weight, on his arm. Spent with over-exertion and nervous excitement, she had fainted. Had it not been for Adelbert's timely succour, Max's strength and courage would have failed him, and the tragedy would have been complete.

For was it not a tragedy?

Some instinct told me what had happened the moment Adelbert put little Bettine down on the bank beside me and laid his hand lingeringly on her heart. I sprang to her side with a cry, and pressed my lips on her pure, red mouth.

She was lying with her hands folded on her breast, her delicate face raised to heaven, like a white lily.

The vision had come true. She was resting safely in the strong, tender arms of her Bridegroom—Death.

Adelbert and I have a little Bettine of our own now. We think that she is like my brave little cousin, in that she is "gentle and loving, and wise and gay."

But I am always glad, for her sake, that she is not "a Sabbath Child."

LADY TREVELYAN.

ALONG a country road a young man was walking one summer night—or rather one summer morning, for it was some time after midnight.

The road stretched in a long white line before him; the sky was clear and dark overhead. The moon rode triumphantly in the cloudless heavens. The dark shadows of the trees which bordered the roadside lay clearly defined, but not a breath of air stirred the branches or fanned the cheek of the pedestrian. The night was deliciously warm and mysteriously quiet; nothing but the sound of his own footsteps broke the stillness.

He was in evening dress, and wore a light overcoat, which was flung open. He was whistling softly, and pursued his way with a light-heartedness only faintly tempered by the loneliness and solemnity which surrounded him. The air of the last new waltz was sufficiently sentimental to sound quite in harmony with the scene, and probably the young man's thoughts were not especially prosaic. He had just left a dance, and visions of slender, white-robed figures floated before his mental vision still. He was by no means satiated with the delights of society; and the exertion of tramping the four miles of country road which lay between his friend's house and his night's lodging seemed a small price to pay for the evening he had enjoyed.

He was hardly *thinking;* vague, pleasant meanderings of fancy were going on in his mind; when suddenly he became aware that he was no longer alone on the road. A slim figure, dressed in black or dark colours, had come in sight, and was rapidly approaching him. A woman, and alone—at such a time!

Jack Barrett stopped in surprise, with his eyes on the advancing figure. Her head was bent, as though she was looking on the ground, and she appeared to be running on almost blindly.

Close to him she raised her head and stopped with a cry of terror as she saw his motionless figure. He noticed then that she was practically bare-headed. Her hat had fallen back, and her hair rose in dusky masses from a pale face, lighted up by her large, frightened eyes.

Jack was a kindly young fellow. That cry of terror went to his heart, and he hastened to say, reassuringly, hardly pausing to weigh his words: "Pray don't be frightened. There is nothing to harm you. Are you in trouble?"

The woman—she was evidently a lady—gave a little gasp, seemed about to speak, and then, to Jack's unutterable dismay, suddenly sank down at his feet, as though she were lifeless.

In another moment he had raised her, and carried her to the bank near the roadside. Then he looked hopelessly round for help, knowing that there was not the faintest probability of any being at hand. He knew the road well; it was a mile to the nearest house, and there was little chance of anyone passing at that hour.

The stranger, in the meantime, lay with her head on his arm, utterly unconscious. Jack looked at her with a growing feeling of surprise. Her dress—of dark, soft material—was elegant in style; her left hand was gloved, and her right, which was bare, was white and delicate, and decorated with costly rings. The dark hair, which nearly touched his cheek, was artistically arranged. Her face was pale, her complexion delicate and clear, and her features were exquisitely pretty.

Jack was not only kind-hearted, but singularly innocent of evil. He was disposed to think ill of no one; least of all of a beautiful young girl. He had not a wide or intimate acquaintance with the opposite sex, but he had a mother whom he adored, and all women, as yet, for him, were surrounded by a halo of purity and goodness.

Yet it must be confessed that strange surmises passed rapidly through his mind as he gazed at the pale, unconscious face of his companion. There was a singular fascination in his situation, unusual and even alarming as it was. Though he became every moment more anxious to see her open her eyes, he felt a strong reluctance to any change from their position. A soft thrill ran through him as he almost unconsciously drew his arm more tightly round the slender figure, and bent nearer and nearer to her face. He started back with a feeling of disgust at himself as he became aware that his lips were hovering over—almost touching—the lips of his companion. He sprang to his feet, letting his burden sink somewhat suddenly on to the bank. What had happened to him? And what must he do?

A movement on the part of the stranger startled him. She was raising her hand in a vague way to her head, and as he again knelt down by her he saw that her eyes were open.

"Are you better?" he asked eagerly.

A terrified start was his answer. She raised herself to a sitting posture, looked wildly along the quiet, moonlit road, then at the young man who knelt near her, and with a shuddering sigh let her head droop upon her breast.

"Pray don't—don't be frightened! I will do anything you ask me—will help you in any way I can," cried Jack earnestly.

She looked at him again more quietly. "Who are you?" she asked in a somewhat faint voice.

"My name is Jack Barrett," he began hurriedly. "I am staying about a mile from here, at a farm just beyond Sir Robert Trevelyan's."

Again he thought his companion started.

"What are you doing here?" she continued.

He had already lost his head so much that it did not occur to him that her presence required more explanation than his, and he hastened to explain that he was merely returning from a dance, with the most innocent intentions in the world.

The beautiful stranger rose to her feet and stood hesitating and silent.

"Can I not help you in any way?" asked Jack humbly.

"Oh, can I trust you?" murmured the girl, as though to herself, and looking round with the same helpless, frightened air as before.

"Yes," said Jack, simply.

"Then listen. I want to go to a station where they won't know me. Rowick will not do," she added, seeing he was going to propose something.

Jack meditated. "I don't know this neighbourhood well," he began regretfully.

"Neither do I," she said, with a sigh.

"But there *is* a quiet little station about five miles off. I could find the way, if you can walk so far."

"Yes, I can walk; but you? I cannot take you so far out of your way at this hour."

"I only ask for permission to go with you," he said.

There was a minute's silence. She drew nearer to him, and looked steadily in his face. He did not flinch, and at last, drawing a deep breath, she said:

"I am going to trust you. But you must make me a promise. You are to ask me no questions of any sort; you must leave me at the station directly we reach it; and you must never—*never*—tell anyone of this meeting."

Jack was perfectly aware that such promises as he was asked for were exceedingly rash. He did not know to what they might bind him, but he hardly hesitated for a moment before he gave his answer.

"I promise," he said hoarsely.

She nodded gravely, readjusted her hat, and murmured, as she looked at her hand: "I have lost my glove."

"You are faint yet; you must lean on me," murmured Jack quickly, catching her hand and drawing it through his arm.

She submitted, and they turned into a field-path to begin their journey.

It was a strange walk, begun in the moonlight and ended in the grey dawn. The stillness of death seemed to reign at first in the fields and roads along which they walked. And then, as the dawn broke, there began to be those rustlings which tell that Nature is awaking. But no sign or sound of human beings disturbed them.

At first they were silent, but before long a conversation began which lasted till they parted. What were the subjects they spoke of? Jack tried to remember afterwards, somewhat vainly. Personal subjects had to be avoided, for he was to know nothing about her. And

yet they talked of themselves—of their thoughts, tastes, feelings, beliefs. They wandered into worlds of speculation, and her soft voice charmed him into agreement even where he at first differed. Perhaps he would oppose her at first, and then he felt her little hand against his side, and looked into her face lit up by her starry eyes and surrounded by her dusky hair, and yielded any point in dispute.

At last the journey was over, and the little station in sight. It was empty, and probably the waiting-room and booking-office would be closed. The girl stopped decidedly. "We must part here," she said.

Jack held her hand more tightly, and looked despairingly into her face.

"I can't," he muttered.

"Remember your promise."

He dropped her hand, and began to turn away.

"Oh, don't go like that," she cried winningly. "You must let me say good-bye. You must let me thank you. You have been so good! Can I do nothing in return?"

He had turned instantly at her call, and stood before her. There was no one to be seen in the cold morning light. They stood at the little wooden gate which admitted to the station—alone in the world. Her lovely violet eyes looked pleadingly into his face.

"I know you will never betray me," she said, "whatever may be the consequences. But I fear there may possibly be a chance that you may suffer—I mean mentally—by keeping your promise to me. I wish I could offer you any return."

Jack came nearer; a crimson flush covered his face.

"You can," he said abruptly.

"What can I do?"

The flush deepened; his eyes dropped for an instant, but he raised them again defiantly as he answered: "You can let me kiss you."

"Oh!" She retreated a step as this exclamation broke from her lips, and looked imploringly at him.

"I know what you mean," he burst out; "you thought I was a gentleman. Well, *I* thought so, too. I tried not to say it, but I couldn't help it. I'm ashamed of myself. But I have a right to something—not for what I've done for you; that's nothing—but to be some comfort in the future, if it's to be without you!"

He stopped and looked at her steadily. Her head drooped. "Yes, you have a right to something—to anything I can give you—to that certainly, if you ask it. *Do* you ask it?"

Jack hesitated—tried to say "no," but the sight of the lovely face raised to his with quivering lips and radiant eyes conquered his resolution.

"Yes," he said defiantly. "I shall hate myself all my life for it, but—I do ask it."

"Then," she said faintly, "I agree." And with her eyes swimming in tears, she held out her hand. He seized it, and drew her towards him. She looked up at him, and he paused. "Oh," she whispered imploringly, "don't, don't—humiliate me so!"

Jack grew terribly pale, but he set his teeth, dropped her hand once more, and said slowly: "Forgive me—and say good-bye."

She dashed the tears away, and gazed at him in silent surprise.

"Have some pity on me," he added, turning his eyes away; "tell me when I shall see you again."

She began to tremble violently. "Oh, I don't know, I don't know," she murmured wildly. "I dare not think you ever will. But I bless you and thank you. I shall never forget you."

She took his hand and pressed it in her own. "Good-bye," she whispered. "What a happy woman your wife will be!"

She suddenly put her quivering lips to his hand, dropped it, and passed rapidly through the little gate into the station. Jack took a step after her, but stopped himself; he covered his eyes with his hand, and when he looked up again she had disappeared. He turned away, and set his face towards his former destination.

It was between four and five o'clock when Jack reached the farm where he was spending his vacation—to read. His next Term at Cambridge would be his last, and he had solemnly devoted the long summer months to work.

With this object he had chosen a quiet country place, where he would have no distractions, as he thought. He had, however, been discovered by a college friend who lived about four miles away from his farm, and from whose house he was returning when he met with the adventure just recorded.

As he had said, he did not know the neighbourhood well; the Morrisons were his only acquaintances; he knew few people even by name.

Sir Robert Trevelyan, whose house he had mentioned as being near his destination, was an important landowner, and the landlord of his host, but he knew little of him, and had never seen him. He passed his lodge-gates as he walked home, but without noticing them. His mind was full of other things, and when he had undressed, he lay sleepless in his bed, gazing at the ceiling, and thinking over every detail of his adventure.

Who was she? And when should he see her again? The last question was the one which recurred most frequently, for the most vivid sensation of which he was aware was a burning desire, an unutterable longing to look upon that beautiful face, and hear that soft voice once more. Jack had never been in love before. He did not ask himself if he were in that condition now—he was, indeed, too far gone to consider the question. At one moment he would rage at himself for daring to insult the beautiful stranger by asking

for that kiss, and then again he would despise himself for foregoing it!

But he finally gave up all attempt to sleep, and rose about seven o'clock, with a vague thought of returning to the station to which he had taken her, and making inquiries about where she had gone to. This would really be breaking his promise, but he felt some step was absolutely necessary.

He wandered disconsolately into his sitting-room, and sat waiting for his breakfast, which generally appeared five minutes after he did.

But this morning he waited in vain. He heard a great deal of talking in the farm kitchen, which was just opposite his "parlour," and could not help the idea that something unusual had happened. This did not occur to him for some time, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts. But the desire to be doing something at last moved him to cross the passage and look into the kitchen.

There he saw a wonderful sight. Mrs. Scott, the farmer's usually busy wife, sitting with her hands in her lap, absolutely unemployed, while two of her servants stood equally idle near. Mr. Scott leant against the table, with an air of immense importance and solemnity.

Mrs. Scott started violently as Jack appeared. "Eh, sir, but you startled me," she cried.

"Why should I startle you?" asked Jack, rather impatiently. "And why don't you bring me my breakfast?"

Mrs. Scott shook her head solemnly. "Don't talk about breakfast, sir," she said.

Jack looked at the farmer. "What is the matter? Are you in any trouble?" he asked.

Mr. Scott slowly gathered himself together to reply, but he was forestalled by his wife.

"There are others besides us in trouble," declared the good woman solemnly. "A dreadful thing has happened, sir; a dreadful deed has been done."

She paused as though to give weight to her words. Jack was rather amused at this theatrical beginning, and did not attach much importance to her solemnity.

"Is it anything to do with the poultry?" he asked, not unnaturally, for Mrs. Scott had looked almost as grave when a chicken had been stolen.

"Oh, Mr. Barrett, sir, don't jest," she said earnestly. "It's murder that's been done!"

"Murder!" cried Jack, turning white and sick, though he could not have said why it should affect him so much.

Mrs. Scott appeared mollified at the sight of his emotion. "Yes, it is terrible news," she said; "and so near us as it happened. I shall never sleep in my bed again—never."

"But who—who is it?" stammered Jack.

"Sir Robert Trevelyan. He was murdered last night, and there's no sign of who has done it."

The young man sat down in order to hide the trembling that was taking possession of him.

"Ah, his poor young wife!" sighed Mrs. Scott. "Not that there was much love lost between them, it's said; but it must be a sad blow for her. And she away, too!"

Jack's head seemed in a whirl, but he tried to steady himself by murmuring "Absurd, absurd! What could one thing have to do with the other? It's pure nonsense!" Then aloud: "I didn't know he had a wife."

"Oh, yes; a beautiful young creature, tall and dark. Did you never see her? And, as I was saying, she's away. She left home yesterday afternoon rather unexpectedly. There will be news for the poor young thing."

"*Why* did you say there's no love lost between them?" demanded Jack, almost fiercely.

"Why, they say so, sir. He is a queer kind of man, Sir Robert—or I should say *was*, poor gentleman. Dear, dear, we must say no evil of the dead. But he was too old for her, anyway, and they hadn't been married long. He brought her here for the first time a few weeks ago—they had always been away before. And so short a time as he's had to live there with her."

Jack rose from the chair he had taken with a desperate desire to withdraw from observation.

"You shall have your breakfast soon, sir," Mrs. Scott called after him as he retreated. "We must live, I suppose."

Alone in the parlour, Jack paced the room with his brain on fire. What did he suspect? Suspect? Absurd! He suspected nothing. But what wild, hideous, mad thought was agonising him? An unhappy young wife—a murdered man, and that terrified flying figure in the moonlight. Oh, it could not, could not be. No, whatever it looked like, it was not that. Why, there must have been a robbery committed, of course, and that would prove his vile suspicion unfounded. No young wife, driven to a desperate step by despair, would be a thief. He must ask for details—he must know more of this. But he must be calm; he must not betray himself; he must not betray *her*.

Mrs. Scott entered the room with a tray. "Eh, sir," she said, "it's upsetting news."

"Yes," he assented; "but you say no one is suspected. Has no robbery been committed?"

"No; that's the strange thing. Nothing seems to have gone. No one can understand it so far. But the police will find out something, you may be sure. But, Mr. Barrett," she added, "you were coming home late last night. What time was it when you passed Sir Robert's?"

Jack paled again. "Half-past four this morning," he said, as quietly as he could. "Why?"

"Oh, what a pity. If you had passed at the time you might have seen something or someone," she remarked complacently.

"No. I saw nothing—nothing," Jack declared vehemently, in spite of his resolve to be quiet.

"Why, of course not, sir. Who would go murdering anyone at half-past four on a summer's morning? That's daytime with us, you know. He'd never escape notice at that time."

Jack was left alone again to try to eat his breakfast and digest his thoughts. What must he do? To make inquiries at the station now would be madness. That terrible suspicion would not leave him. And if he determined there was nothing in it, how did he know that it would not occur to others if he turned their attention to the girl he had met. If he could *see* Lady Trevelyan, and know at once if his suspicion were correct that the wanderer was she! Then, again, he felt that to have his suspicion confirmed even to that extent would be unbearable.

After a terrible day of doubts and fears, and a restless, almost sleepless night, Jack determined he would leave the place which had become so frightful to him, and return home to London. There, at any rate, he would be out of sight of the road which recalled his midnight adventure so well, and would be better able to forget it.

He paid a hurried call on the Morrisons, and informed them he was obliged to return home sooner than he expected. The chief subject of conversation was the murder, and many were the conjectures as to the cause and the person. But Lady Trevelyan was spoken of merely with pity. There seemed no chance of any inquiry about his strange companion being made. Yet as Jack's train steamed out of the station at Rowick—the nearest town—he breathed a sigh of relief, and vowed it should be long before he saw that country-side again.

II.

In fact it was four years before Jack revisited the neighbourhood of his midnight encounter. During those years much had happened to him. He had finished his college course, and had decided on his career in life. The church and the bar had both been suggested to him, but his inclination was for neither. Jack had an earnest desire to repay his mother (who was far from rich) for the many sacrifices she had made for him, and he therefore promptly accepted the offer of a rich merchant uncle to enter his business. There Jack had proved himself an able lieutenant; he liked business, and there was every prospect that his uncle would make him a junior partner before long.

In the meantime, the memory of his meeting with the mysterious stranger had by no means died away.

Sometimes it was as fresh in his mind as ever, and he could see

the face and form of the woman he had assisted as clearly as the minute after he had parted from her. Yet as the passion she had so suddenly roused in him paled with time, he became more and more convinced that his terrible suspicion as to her identity and situation was the correct one. That she could have deliberately committed a murder, he could hardly believe; but that in a moment of passion, of anguish without premeditation, she might have been so tempted he admitted to be possible.

He had diligently searched the papers for some mention of the discovery of Sir Robert Trevelyan's murderer, but no such discovery was reported. The case seemed to be one of those mysteries which sometimes remain undiscovered to the end.

About a year after the event, Jack received a letter from his worthy hostess, Mrs. Scott, accompanying a gold stud which he had lost in their house and which had only just been found. The farmer's wife had a warm liking for the frank, gentlemanly young fellow who had lodged with them for a few weeks, and her letter was not confined to the statement as to the stud, but gave him various pieces of news.

Among the rest, she told him that Sir Robert's murderer had never been discovered, and that his widow had never "been nigh the place" since the terrible event.

"No wonder," thought Jack. Turning his attention to his letter again, he found that Mrs. Scott added that she had, however, heard the widow was thinking of consoling herself, though probably she would not bring her new husband to "the ill-fated place."

Jack mused on this information, and was constantly picturing his beautiful companion as a bride. He always thought of her as "Lady Trevelyan," and, indeed, he had no idea of any other name for her.

Jack was a popular young man, and it cannot be denied that he liked the society of women, but he had not yet shown any inclination to bestow his heart upon one in particular. He sometimes asked himself the reason, but could find no satisfactory answer. Yet perhaps he knew, though he confessed nothing even to himself.

It was, then, nearly four years after his adventure that he received an invitation from his old friend Morrison to spend Christmas with him.

The Morrisons' house, Fairfield, was a fine old-fashioned country residence; there were sure to be plenty of guests and merry times, and yet Jack felt a reluctance to accept the invitation. He and his mother were accustomed to spend Christmas with some relations, but Mrs. Barrett urged him to go to Fairfield, saying that she would pay her usual visit alone. She could not understand his hesitation, as she knew of no real obstacle in the way.

Jack could not tell her the cause of his doubting, for it was a strange, absurd shrinking from revisiting the scene of the midnight meeting which has been recorded. He laughed at himself, and finally decided to cast such foolish ideas to the wind.

Accordingly, he accepted the invitation, and one clear, frosty afternoon, drove up to Fairfield, accompanied by George Morrison, who had met him at Rowick station.

The pretty, blue-eyed girl who met him in the hall was very little changed in the four years that had passed since he had seen her; and as she came forward with her sweet smile, Jack asked himself whether, perhaps, after all, he had not been thinking of Ethel Morrison all the time. But the equanimity with which he heard George's news that his sister was engaged, convinced him that he was heart-whole as far as she was concerned.

This information was given as the two young men proceeded to the drawing-room, after Jack had dressed for dinner. "There are lots of people here," observed George, as he threw open the drawing-room door.

There were, indeed, a number of people, who all appeared to be much engaged with themselves and each other. At the first glance, Jack decided they were strangers to him; but at the second—his heart gave a wild leap, his head seemed to swim, and he mechanically clutched George's arm tightly to keep himself upright.

Yet he was in reality no longer conscious of his friend's presence, nor, indeed, of the presence of the various people in the room. One figure only stood out clearly before his eyes; a figure which made such a sudden, vivid impression on him, and recalled a passed scene so distinctly, that he almost believed himself standing in a moonlit road, looking at a lovely, death-pale face.

"What is the matter?"

The voice of George Morrison asking this question for the second time roused Jack, and he glanced round in a bewildered way.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered hastily. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, merely out of curiosity," replied George drily. "One is naturally a little curious when a man nearly twists your arm off, and stares as if he had seen a ghost."

Jack smiled faintly. "Forgive me," he said. "There *was* something; but don't press me about it, there's a good fellow."

There was a minute's pause; conversation was going on briskly, and the entrance of the two young men had not been specially noticed. The person on whom Jack's eyes and thoughts were fixed was standing near a window at the other end of the room with Ethel Morrison, and seemed unaware of his presence.

"To whom shall I introduce you?" asked young Morrison, scanning Jack closely.

"Oh, anyone you like."

"To the greatest beauty in the room?" continued George as before.

"Which is that?" asked Jack innocently.

"Come, don't pretend you don't know. You have never taken your eyes off her since we came in."

"The lady talking to your sister, you mean? She is certainly beautiful; but——"

Jack hesitated—he feared that the sudden sight of him might startle her. George, however, took his arm and led him towards her.

As they approached, she turned suddenly and looked at them. A scarcely perceptible start, and the rapid turning away of her eyes were all the signs that appeared, but Jack was certain she had recognised him.

A moment after he was being presented, and Miss Morrison in introducing the lady uttered the name "Mrs. Langley."

"Langley," thought Jack, in amazement, and then he remembered Mrs. Scott's story that Lady Trevelyan was about to be married again. No doubt she had done so, and dropped her title. Perhaps her husband was here with her. Was it possible that she could return to a place so fraught with terrible associations? Was she one of those beautiful fiends of whom he had read in fiction?

She met his glance with an inscrutable face, and with eyes that did not flinch. She smiled the faint, fugitive smile which had lighted up her face occasionally during that strange walk. She talked easily; she was perfectly composed.

Jack, for his part, was too bewildered to be at his ease. When, a few minutes later, Ethel Morrison introduced him to his partner for dinner, a bright young girl, he could hardly command himself enough to behave with ordinary politeness, and his conversational powers during the meal were conspicuous by their absence. His companion was naturally disgusted, and she ever afterwards spoke of him as "that stupid Mr. Barrett."

Jack perhaps deserved the name on this occasion. He was unable to keep his thoughts for a moment from Mrs. Langley, and his eyes wandered frequently in the same direction. The lady was not exactly gay, but she seemed to be sufficiently occupied in conversation. She smiled often and looked exceedingly tranquil. Once only Jack thought he caught her eyes fixed doubtfully and searchingly on his face, but she immediately withdrew them.

He rose from table with a determination to see her alone that evening; but he found himself in his bedroom without having accomplished his desire. He had spoken to Mrs. Langley a little; but had found her much in request. Moreover, he had discovered that Mr. Langley, whoever he might be, was not at Fairfield.

One other discovery he had made: that the lady of his midnight adventure was as lovely and even more attractive to him than on that well-remembered evening.

The next morning was spent chiefly in billiards by the men of the party, and they saw little of the ladies till luncheon.

Shortly after that, however, fortune favoured Jack. Coming into the library in search of his cigar-case, which he had left there in the

morning, he saw Mrs. Langley alone in the room. She was standing before a book-case, scanning the shelves closely. Jack shut the door and advanced towards her. She turned round at the sound of his footsteps, and for a moment her self-possession deserted her. She became very pale, and took a hurried step towards the door.

"Forgive my intrusion," began Jack, gently; "but I so much wished to speak to you."

"To me, Mr. Barrett?" she repeated, rapidly recovering herself, and stopping on her way.

"Yes." Jack hesitated a moment, and then, looking straight into her eyes, said steadily: "We have met before, I believe?"

"Before now, certainly; last night and this morning at breakfast, if I am not mistaken," she answered lightly.

"Four years ago this next June, in the Rowick Road; not far from—Sir Robert Trevelyan's," said Jack.

"You are romancing," exclaimed the lady.

Jack looked at her reproachfully, and the colour came into her cheeks, whilst her eyes sank before his. She looked so lovely that his heart began to beat as wildly as on that morning when they parted. Her air of innocent sweetness made him furious with her, with himself, with fate, which after giving him these years in which to recover from his madness, had reopened the wound. It was folly; it was worse.

"Do you deny it? Do you add a lie to—to——"

Here he stopped, not daring to say more.

She suddenly looked up, and he saw that her hands, which were clasped tightly together, were trembling.

"No, I confess it," she said abruptly. "Now, what have you to say?"

Jack was silent. He had, in fact, nothing to say: that is, nothing that he would say. Should he ask her if his suspicions were correct? That was impossible. Should he tell her what at that moment he for the first time knew to be the case—that he was a mad fool and loved her? Loved her, though he knew nothing of her and suspected her of the most horrible crime? But he did not suspect her—he could not!

"Your flight was successful?" he began at last.

She looked surprised.

"I escaped discovery—yes," she said, sinking her voice. "But I lived to regret the wild step I had taken: to bitterly regret it. You, who do not know the circumstances, cannot guess."

"But I *do* know the circumstances!" cried Jack.

"You do?" she cried, gazing at him with bewildered eyes. "How could you possibly find them out? Then you tried to make discoveries? You broke the spirit of your promise to me, though you kept the letter?"

"No, no; you are mistaken," he said eagerly. "I tried to dis-

cover nothing. The knowledge was forced upon me, and I left the place instantly, chiefly for your sake. Oh, when you thought I might suffer, you seemed to have no idea of the agony, the horror, that the discovery of the truth would produce in me. And yet—I would protect you—screen you—at the cost of my life," he ended fiercely.

Her eyes had opened wide, and her colour went and came fitfully as he spoke.

"Agony? horror?" she began, when the door opened suddenly, and Ethel Morrison entered. Neither of the two she had surprised was able to hide entirely the confusion both felt, but Jack was the most alarmed. Mrs. Langley turned almost instantly to Ethel with the remark: "Are you ready to go out so soon? Wait for me, and I will put on my hat."

Left alone with Ethel, Jack hurriedly began the search for the cigar-case, hoping she would not ask him any questions. She remained silent, and it was he who broke the ice by asking abruptly: "Where is Mr. Langley?"

Ethel started, and looked at him with horrified eyes.

"Do you mean to say you did not know that he was dead—that she is a widow?"

"Dead!" repeated Jack, in amazement. "Did she kill off all her husbands?" he thought. "But she is not in mourning?"

"Mr. Langley has been dead for two or three years," replied Ethel, and she presently left the room.

Jack paced the room in bewilderment. The thought that she was free never entered his mind. His one idea was whether he had cruelly misjudged her, and whether after all she was not guilty of her first husband's death. But what did her expressions of regret mean? "Regret!" That was a mild word to use! "Oh, she must be a fiend!" murmured poor Jack.

That evening a dance was got up. Mrs. Langley looked radiant in her delicate ball-dress, and stole a deprecating glance at Jack as she passed him. He had almost resolved to fly from Fairfield, and not risk the opportunity of seeing her again; but he had stayed, and now found himself irresistibly attracted to her side. He could not deny himself the delight of dancing with her, and as he whirled round the room with her to the delicious strains of a waltz, he resolved to forget that horrible, impossible story, and be happy.

He did not succeed either in really forgetting the story or being happy; but before the evening was over he had danced five times with Mrs. Langley, and each dance left him more madly in love than the last. That she encouraged him was certain. He felt it, and allowed himself to dream wildly as he met the sweet eyes which looked up into his.

He passed a night of restless dreams and broken sleep, and came down to the late breakfast on the following morning with eyes which

told their tale of sleeplessness. It was Christmas Day, and the church bells were sounding through the crisp, frosty air as they rose from breakfast.

Mrs. Langley had not appeared—rather to Jack's relief. Could he hurry away from Fairfield? Not on Christmas Day, certainly, but he determined that the next morning he would have an important telegram. He must tear himself away from this dangerous influence.

He formed one of the church-going party. Mrs. Langley did not. They met at luncheon, but were at a distance from each other.

After that meal, Jack was seized by some of the men for billiards, and so dinner-time approached. He had been told that other visitors from the neighbourhood were to arrive for dinner, and, therefore, when he reached the drawing-room, he was not surprised to see several people he did not know. Mrs. Langley was not there, and he talked languidly to George about the events of the day. A dark, handsome, quiet-looking woman of perhaps five-and-twenty was sitting on a sofa alone, and George, indicating this lady, observed, "She is handsome, isn't she?"

"Who is she," asked Jack, absently.

"Lady Trevelyan."

Jack stared at his companion as though he thought him mad, and said: "*Who?*"

"Lady Trevelyan," repeated George emphatically; adding in an irritated tone: "Gracious goodness, man, what is wrong with you? You're always starting and turning pale. First it was Mrs. Langley, now it's someone else. What is wrong with Lady Trevelyan?"

"Nothing—if *that's* Lady Trevelyan."

"Of course it is. Who did you suppose she was?"

"Oh, I didn't suppose she was anybody," replied Jack feebly, unaware of the point in his speech.

George laughed. "But she *is* somebody, I can tell you. Here comes Mrs. Langley. By-the-way, you're to take her down to dinner to-night, I hear—happy man."

"Stop a moment," said Jack. "Is that lady the widow of Sir Robert Trevelyan, who was murdered that summer I was stopping near you?"

"Yes; I've told you so twice already."

Jack offered his arm to take Mrs. Langley to dinner, feeling as if he were in a dream. He had been wrong from the very beginning, then. The woman he loved was not the widow of the murdered man, and it was surely possible that she knew nothing of the crime. He must know all, and put an end to this torturing suspense.

"Are you ill, Mr. Barrett?" asked Mrs. Langley suddenly, looking at him anxiously.

"No; but I implore you to give me a few minutes alone after dinner. I *must* speak to you," he replied in a passionate whisper.

"This evening?" asked his companion, in surprise.

"Yes, at once—I cannot bear this doubt," he said, more earnestly than before.

She hesitated for a moment, and then replied: "I cannot understand you, but perhaps it is better that we should have an explanation. I think you were mistaken in something you said yesterday."

"Then you will let me speak to you in the library, after dinner?" asked Jack eagerly. "It is sure to be empty."

Mrs. Langley assented; and the instant Jack could escape from the table, he hastened to the appointed place, and was not surprised to find her waiting for him. She was sitting in a low chair, and he came and stood before her.

"I told you I knew the circumstances attending your flight that night!" he began abruptly.

"Yes, and that is what puzzled me so," she replied, in her soft, even tones, looking up at him.

"I don't wonder you were puzzled. Do you know who I thought you were till an hour or two ago?"

She shook her head.

"Lady Trevelyan—that is—the widow of Sir Robert Trevelyan, who was murdered that very night."

She uttered a cry of astonishment. "But why—why—how on earth did you get the idea?"

"Oh, because I was a fool, I suppose," cried Jack, furious with himself. "I wanted some explanation of your flight, and who you were; and that view seemed to come as an answer—a terrible one—the next morning."

"A terrible one!" she repeated wonderingly.

"Terrible? Agonising!" exclaimed Jack, as he began to pace the room in his agitation. "What could I think?"

"I can't imagine what you thought," said his companion, looking at him with astonished eyes; "except that you believed me to be Lady Trevelyan. But why that should have seemed terrible to you I cannot conceive."

Jack stopped, and returned her gaze in silence for a moment. She had no idea of his wicked—as it now seemed to him, monstrous—suspicion. Why need he tell her? He knew now that she was—must be—guiltless; she was free; he loved her; why should he not keep silence about that past folly, and try to win her? By confessing what he had for a moment fancied, was he not ruining his every chance? But Jack was one of the honestest of men. He could not bear the thought of hiding such a thing from her, and after a short struggle, he burst out:

"Oh, don't you understand me? I was mad, of course, but I didn't know you. The murder startled me. It was so mysterious. There was no robbery, and what motive could there be? But you—an unhappy wife as I fancied you—oh, what can I say?"

She had suddenly grown pale, and risen to her feet. As he neared her, she retreated with a look of horror.

"And you thought—you thought—such a horrible, such an unutterable thing of me?" she gasped in a faint voice.

"No, no," he protested wildly. "I didn't think it—I couldn't. You must see I didn't, for I loved you—loved you all the time—as I love you now—as I shall love you till I die!"

This passionate declaration did not seem to soothe her. She held out her hand, as though to keep him away, and said in a horrified whisper: "Oh, could anyone think that of me? And above all, you, whose memory I have treasured all these years?"

This last speech maddened Jack by the enchanting possibilities of what might have been, that seemed to lie in it. "Have some pity for me," he said in low, broken tones; "I knew it was all false, all wrong, when I spoke to you just now, but I couldn't bear to hide it from you. I was honest, if a madman."

There was a short pause. His companion had retreated to the window, and stood leaning against the wall near it, pale and drooping. He did not dare to approach her, but stood like a criminal, waiting for a word of pardon.

At last, she looked up, and said quietly: "Let me tell you the real secret of that night. I was the wife of Mr. Langley, who lived not far from the place where we met. I was married against my will, or rather against my inclination, a few weeks before that time. I was eighteen, and my husband was sixty. You will think, and justly, that I was wicked to consent to such a marriage. I was foolish and wrong, but I married to save my father from ruin. He was in the power of Mr. Langley. I agreed to the sacrifice, in ignorance of the real character of the man I married. He was"—she stopped for an instant and grew paler—"he was a fiend, I think. I can't bear to speak of my life with him, but I was so miserable that I almost lost my reason. He had brought me to his home in the country a fortnight after we married, and after a month of torture, I ran away—the night you met me. I escaped to my father, and with his help hid myself. He had been selfish and wrong to agree to my sacrifice, but, in justice to him, I must say he also did not really know what Mr. Langley was. For some months my husband tried to find me, but he was in miserable health even at the time of our marriage, and he died the following year."

She stopped, and Jack came a step nearer, and fixed his eyes imploringly upon her.

"Oh," she cried wildly, "if you had not told me that cruel suspicion! I thought of you so often, and the very thought that you were in the world made me happy! You were so good, so sweet, so noble to me that night! I had never before known that a man could be so good to a woman. My father was never very kind to me. No man had ever been like that to me before. And that moment, when

you didn't kiss me, I could have fallen at your feet. And yet you—you——" She broke into hopeless sobs.

Jack flung himself down on his knees before her, and besought her not to drive him mad.

"Don't—don't! I can't bear it," he said passionately. "I tell you I didn't believe it of you—I didn't. I could sooner have believed it of myself. I loved you—I have loved you ever since. *How* could I have loved you if I had thought that?"

She was frightened at his violent distress, checked her sobs, dried her eyes, and asked him gently to sit down and be comforted. He rose to his feet, while his companion herself took her former seat. He began to pace the room again, and she sat silently watching him. At last he approached her.

"I suppose you hate the sight of me now," he said piteously, "so I won't trouble you any more. If you knew how I love you, you would pity me a little. I will only ask one favour before I leave you. Tell me your name."

"My name?" she repeated.

"Yes, I want to know your name—your Christian name, to think of you by."

A soft colour stole into her cheeks. "How strange," she murmured; "why, I have known *your* name all these years and thought of you by it. It's such a manly name. Mine is Barbara," she added softly.

Jack's heart was beating frantically at her tone as she spoke of his name, and he repeated, "Barbara! I shall love it for ever. Oh, my darling, my heart will break. But won't you call me *once* by my name before I go?"

"Come here—Jack," she answered with a sudden blush and smile. "No—no nearer," was hurriedly added as he approached her. He stood and trembled with suspense.

Barbara rose from her seat. "Tell me first," she said, "if you remember the last words I said to you that morning."

"The last words you said to me?" repeated Jack, who was getting so intoxicated with hope that he could not remember anything.

"Ah, you don't? What a miserable lover!" cried Barbara, with a soft laugh. "Well, they were these: 'What a happy woman your wife will be!'"

Jack's gaze spoke volumes but his lips said not a word. She looked at him with tender eyes and glowing cheeks, and holding out her hand, whispered: "Ah, Jack, I want to be happy!"

That pretty little hand was not taken, but the next moment Jack's arms were both flung round her, while he took from her quivering lips the kiss which, as he afterwards said, she had owed him for nearly four years.

HELIGOLAND.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S.,
Author of "Letters from Majorca," &c. &c.

A "Studio" on Sandy Island.

THERE is much that is pleasant and interesting in Hamburg; a great deal to take one there and to keep one there for at least a short sojourn. It is a Free City—or rather it was so; for it delivered up its freedom on the 15th of October of the present year—and one seems to breathe more freely in consequence. Of course this is a mere fancy; an idea; but fancies and ideas have ruled mankind far more than stubborn facts. Would not the fate of the world have been changed if Cleopatra's nose had been a quarter of an inch longer; and was it not therefore Cæsar's fancy which then decided the course of affairs?

There is no Cleopatra in Hamburg, but no doubt it has its beautiful women to direct its welfare, twine its men round their little fingers and make them do their capricious bidding. I did not see them, but I am sure they are there. For fair women are everywhere; and if there are few of them, the greater their power.

It is a fair City, this Hamburg. It is given up to business and trade, and its aristocracy is composed of those who grow rich by sale and barter. But it has charming drives and beautiful environs. It has broad, well-built streets, and that lovely sheet of water, the Alster, would alone make its fortune. To drive round it and watch, on the one hand, the swans gliding about majestically, looking as if the world were made for them; to see the small steamboats darting about like dragon-flies, swiftly as arrows from a bow; to mark the palatial residences on the other hand, groaning with gilding and every sign of wealth: is to cry aloud that those who live here have had their lines cast in pleasant places. They have waxed rich by industry, by perseverance, by virtue of intelligence; in some instances perhaps by fate. For on looking round we may well ask ourselves occasionally if there

be or be not such a thing as FATE. To some men all seems to come, whether they will or not; to others nothing comes, try as they will. The tide in their affairs never reaches the flood, and Fortune remains a phantom. "Have nothing to do with an unlucky man," said the first and greatest Rothschild on his death-bed, so that he evidently believed in fate. He must have observed human nature and studied it, and he spoke from conviction born of experience.

So the successful merchants of Hamburg have made their city fair and flourishing. They live in the lap of luxury and take their ease. All this has its dangers: let us hope they escape them for the most part.

There are many ways of escaping out of the city, but none fairer than the drive which skirts the banks of the river, seawards. The road is a little inland, so that you only see the water by gleams and flashes. But intervening is a long succession of still more palatial residences than those already referred to. They stand in grounds oftentimes of great extent, kept with a care which does credit to their owners. The flowers are rich and rare and reign in profusion.

Within the town the walk round the Alster is still more delicious than the drive. The swans come up and talk to you, with their eyes if not with their tongues; and there is a language of the eye more eloquent than words. So at least we are told by the Romeos and Juliettes of the world; and like Rothschild on a prosier subject, they speak from experience. Everyone has his pet hobby, trade or profession, in which he is better posted up than his neighbours; and it is on that special subject that you should draw him out. Thus a cobbler may discourse eloquently upon the making of shoes, but will know nothing of pictures, taste, or Shakespeare. Talk to him of the one, and he is a philosopher; of the other and you find him a simpleton.

Speaking of pictures brings to mind the gallery of Hamburg, a small but interesting collection; one might even write interesting because small. For who does not know the interminable weariness of unlimited picture galleries? Such, for instance, as those of Florence: those endless corridors, lined with portraits, that lead from the Uffizi Gallery to the Pitti Palace, and seem to be leading the maddened and expiring pedestrian to his doom. Not a chair or a bench on which to rest your wearied limbs. If you close your eyes for a moment's repose and walk onwards, you are suddenly brought up at one of the innumerable angles, and find that you have been knocked out of time and condition.

But in Hamburg the gallery is just small enough to be thoroughly enjoyed: and if many of the pictures are modern they have been well chosen. One picture I can never forget. It was by that prince of Danish artists, Melbye. As I stood and looked, it thrilled and thrilled through me: as a fine piece of music will thrill one, or the tones of an exquisite voice; occasionally a fine passage in a great

work; but a picture seldom. It may call out all one's admiration, one's delight; but rarely that deeper emotion which seems to come from the soul itself, rather than from the senses.

This picture was not large: and, with Ruskin, I believe that very large pictures lose their effect. The mind becomes conscious of effort. The most concentrated effects give the greatest results. Chamber-music will for ever charm far more than music heard in a concert hall. In the latter case, indeed, space and the crowd destroy more than half the enjoyment, and a nervous exhaustion ensues which makes the price paid a serious consideration.

There was no fear of nervous exhaustion in gazing at Melbye's picture. The subject was not given up to minute detail, but was broad and comprehensive. A wide expanse of sea, full of depth and gloom, beneath which might have been written

> "What hid'st thou in thy treasured caves and cells
> Thou ever-sounding and mysterious main?
> * * * * * *
> To thee the love of woman hath gone down."

The intense loneliness was heightened by the introduction of a solitary bird flying across the wide waste, hieing on some special errand, the only visible thing of life. Perhaps it was charged with the message:

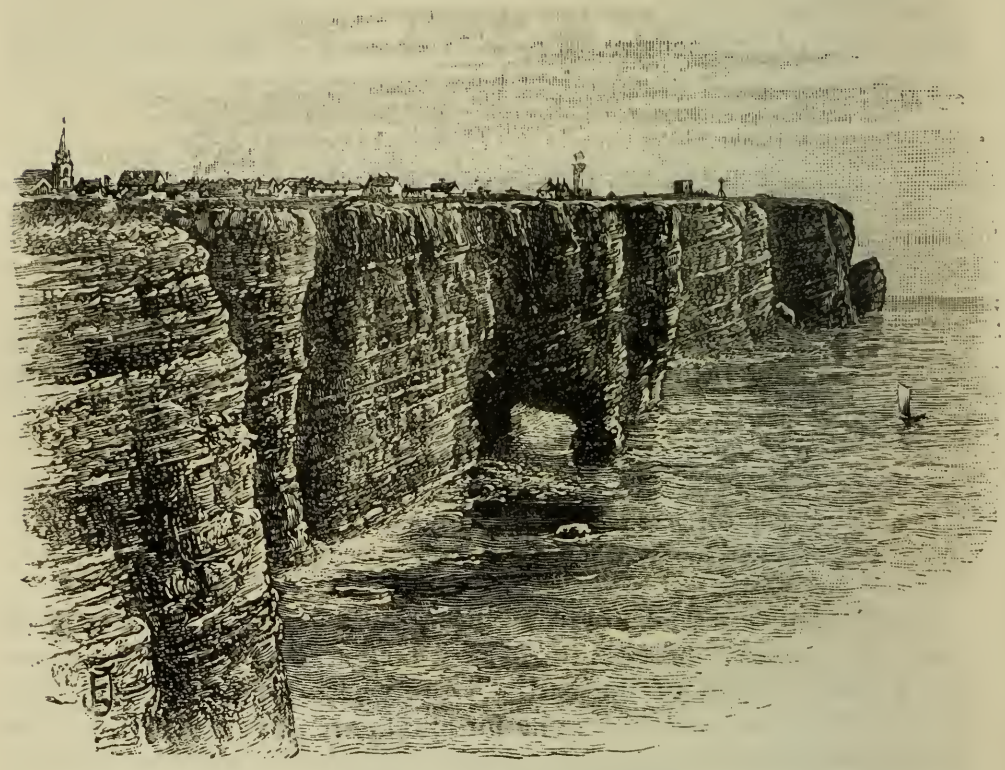
> "If you fly thither over heath and lea,
> Oh, honey-seeking bee,
> Oh, careless swallow,
> Bid some for whom I watch, keep watch for me."

It was neither a bee nor a swallow, but a sea-gull: yet strong of wing and purpose, and able to roam, it might well carry such a message to the confines of the earth. And what would life be without these waitings and watchings one for another? Our close friends for companionship, our popes for imitation, our heroines for a softer and more refining sentiment?

Lastly, the Grand Hotel on the Alster is not one of the least of Hamburg's charms. It is well organised and lures one to a longer stay. The view over the water from the upper front windows is especially beautiful and reminds one of far-famed Stockholm. It is luxury to sit in the covered courtyard and take your breakfast, lunch or supper, as the case may be. Only dinner is served in the large dining-room, at five o'clock; but it is served to perfection. The chef makes an art of his trade. There is a certain wine, too, which seems to be nectar brought straight from Olympus. I will not declare it, for the stock is getting low, and when it is exhausted one of the charms of the hotel will cease to be. We had a special little waiter, also, who delighted to do our bidding, who watched our smallest sign, and was jealous if, when

absent for a moment, one of his confrères took up the tale and supplied our needs. He moved about without noise, and waited in the same silent, perfect manner; and he, too, was an indispensable adjunct to the well-ordering of the house.

My motive in coming to Hamburg is explained by the title of this paper. Carl S. lived in Hamburg, and we had promised ourselves for a whole year past to visit Heligoland together. His letters were growing more and more impatient as I seemed to delay. But delay was inevitable. We cannot be in two places at once, and whilst in sight and sound of the blue waters of the Mediterranean, it



WEST COAST, HELIGOLAND.

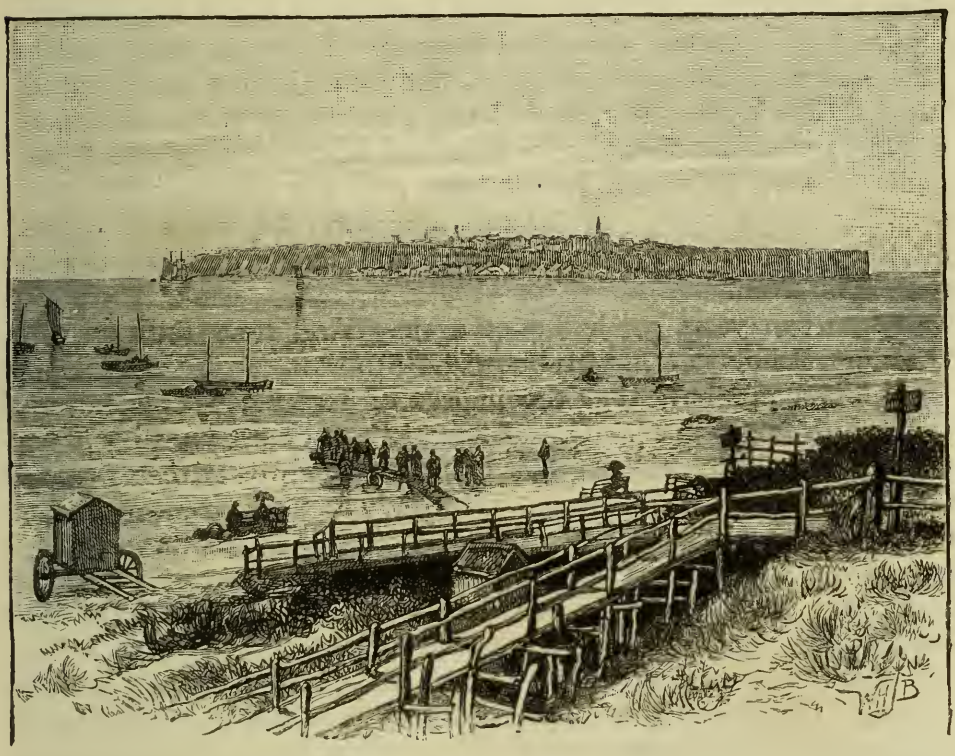
was impossible to be enjoying the healthier atmosphere of northern skies. Yet the time came, as all times must and will come. There is a time to laugh and a time to weep; a time to be born and a time to die. It is said that we never believe the latter of ourselves; but it will come for all that.

I reached Hamburg late one night by the steamer which had started from Hull. But I am told that there is a far better way than this of reaching the fair city. To take one of the steamers of the Orient Line, which start from Southampton Water, calling at Bremen. From Bremen, a three hours' journey by train brings you to Hamburg. These vessels are far larger and better than the Hull boats; they are more comfortable; there is more accommodation; the commissariat department is first-rate—praise which certainly cannot apply

to the Hull boats. And lastly, the fare is not very much more than half the price of the Hull line.

I cannot speak of this route by experience, but it sounds excellent, and the above particulars were given to me on good authority.

The run across from Hull had been very calm and pleasant; and, in spite of the fine summer of 1887, calm passages were rather the exception. It was a dark, starry night, as we steamed up the Alster. Nearing the town, the river became more and more crowded with shipping; vessels of all sizes. Immense warehouses upreared



SANDY ISLAND. BATHERS WAITING FOR A BOAT TO RETURN TO HELIGOLAND.

their heads upon the quays. One might have been steaming up the busiest part of the Thames or Mersey. It was Sunday, and going on for midnight, and everything was absolutely quiet. The world was sleeping; silent as the stars above.

We steamed slowly upwards to our landing stage. There were two of these landing stages, one a mile beyond the other. The second stage was the more central, but this I did not know. At the second there would be no cabs, said the good and amiable skipper. If I did not land at the first stage, I must stay on board all night. He thought this the better plan; I did not. These small and heated cabins are one of the miseries of travelling; one escapes from them the very first possible moment, as a bird let loose flies from its cage.

So I landed at stage No. 1, and thereby missed Carl S., who, faithful friend that he was, had come down at the midnight hour to meet me, and rashly chosen stage No. 2. When the steamer reached its final resting-place, the captain informed him that I had flown, thanks to his no doubt excellent advice.

I made the best of my way to the hotel, and in due time C. arrived also. But by that time I had long been in my room, and the fatherly portier advised my being left to quiet slumbers. So C. departed "with lingering steps and slow"—like Adam and Eve going out of Paradise.

The next morning at seven o'clock I suddenly began to dream of thunder and lightning, storm and tempest. I awoke, and thought that I had been asleep five minutes, but the night had really passed. The door flew open. In rushed C. like a whirlwind, and in a moment my breath was taken away in a bear-like embrace in which I was helpless. But C. was a Swede, tall and fair and good-looking, according to the fashion of his kith and kin; he was twenty-one, and full of impulse and enthusiasm; and under these conditions much is forgiven.

So after two years we had met again. And time rolls on and brings everything to him who knows how to wait.

But although I have sung the praises of Hamburg, it was not our intention to linger there. C. was impatient to be away; I could see that; though, like Ruth, he was good enough to say that where I was, there he only cared to be. He really thought he meant it, but the human heart is so desperately self-deceiving. He was in Hamburg for the purpose of learning German, and did not care for the place. Its business flavour was not to his liking, whilst the air was altogether different from that of his fatherland.

A small boat was starting for Heligoland on Wednesday; a larger boat on Thursday. Impatience and ill-luck caused us to choose the former. We spent two happy days in Hamburg, into which we crowded the events of four: and on the Wednesday morning we turned our backs upon the old town.

Old by courtesy, for a great part of its antiquity has disappeared. Some traces of its ancient pedigree, however, yet remain. Narrow streets and gabled houses; very picturesque, very dirty; very much inhabited by members of the Hebrew persuasion. One would not like to live there, even for twenty-four hours: but, like the Hebrew quarter in Rome, which has been so ruthlessly pulled down and is now one vast wilderness of brick and mortar—as I witnessed only a month ago—this ancient quarter of Hamburg is delightful to contemplate from a respectful distance.

We left on Wednesday. The sun shone in a cloudless sky. The little boat was crowded. As far as we could see, few except ourselves were on pleasure bent. The passengers were for the most part of the humbler class, accompanied by baskets of all sizes and descriptions,

laden with vegetables, or butter, or poultry, or some other article of commerce without which the world would never roll easily on what Mrs. Malaprop or one of her disciples has called its axle.

The ladies, besides baskets, carried umbrellas, which, like Joseph's coat, were of many colours. The men carried pipes; and they were very black pipes, and anything but agreeable.

We managed to find ourselves a corner where we were sufficiently to ourselves, and the journey commenced. It was full of life and interest. Even the crowd on board was an amusing study of human nature. It must be admitted that they were quiet and inoffensive: wonderfully so for Germans. No doubt the possible fear of sea-sickness had its effect upon them: but so the effect be agreeable, never mind its cause. Most of them were bound for Cuxhaven, the only place at which the boat called on its way to Heligoland: and it is not river *all* the way to Cuxhaven.

We passed through the shipping. The quays this morning were a contrast to Sunday night. They were alive with bustle and work; men shouting; hurrying to and fro; throwing bales about like ninepins; whilst every floor of every warehouse was receiving or sending forth merchandise. Further on, came the gorgeous villas of the merchants of Hamburg, who have waxed rich and great, and filled their barns with plenty.

Then the river widened and all passed away, and we had flat stretches of land on either side and a great deal of water about and beyond us.

After five hours of quiet steaming—our little craft was not equal to twenty knots an hour, or even half that—we reached the quaint little town of Cuxhaven; a very pleasant picture, quiet and primitive. It looked somewhat like a toy town, but more a village than a town; still more like a quiet "settlement" than either. The sand was white and sparkling, and the waters of the North Sea rolled gently and lovingly over it. Green banks full of repose, suggestive of pastoral delights, sloped upwards and fell away in verdant stretches. A white lighthouse rose out of the midst of a sandy bank, its glass coronet flashing in the sunlight. Beyond all this, white, deliciously cool houses, low built, with red and yellow slanting roofs, found their habitation. Altogether it seemed a small Arcadia; the more striking from its contrast with noisy, sumptuous Hamburg.

We had twenty minutes here, and C., who had friends in Cuxhaven, suggested a flying visit on shore.

He found his friends at home, for it was their dinner hour. They were, of course, astonished to see him, and wanted to keep him altogether: a proposal which so startled him that he bid them a hurried farewell, and we hastened back to the boat. We were only just in time, for the second bell was sounding.

We started this time with an almost empty vessel. Market baskets and their owners had all landed at Cuxhaven. We scarcely knew

our quarters again. There were some half-dozen passengers besides ourselves, and that was all. We prepared for a delightful trip across the North Sea, as far as Heligoland.

Until now the day had been calm and fine. Occasionally a cloud had rolled out of the horizon, and rolled away again; but nothing indicated a change of weather. Yet a change was coming. In less than ten minutes after leaving Cuxhaven, the wind rose, and the sky grew black. The sea, in so short a time that it seemed magic, had lashed itself to fury. The wind rose higher and higher. It shrieked, and whistled, and roared; we could not hear ourselves speak. The sea began to break over the vessel in great waves; pouring over the sides; pouring into the cabins. We were much more under the water and in the water than upon it.

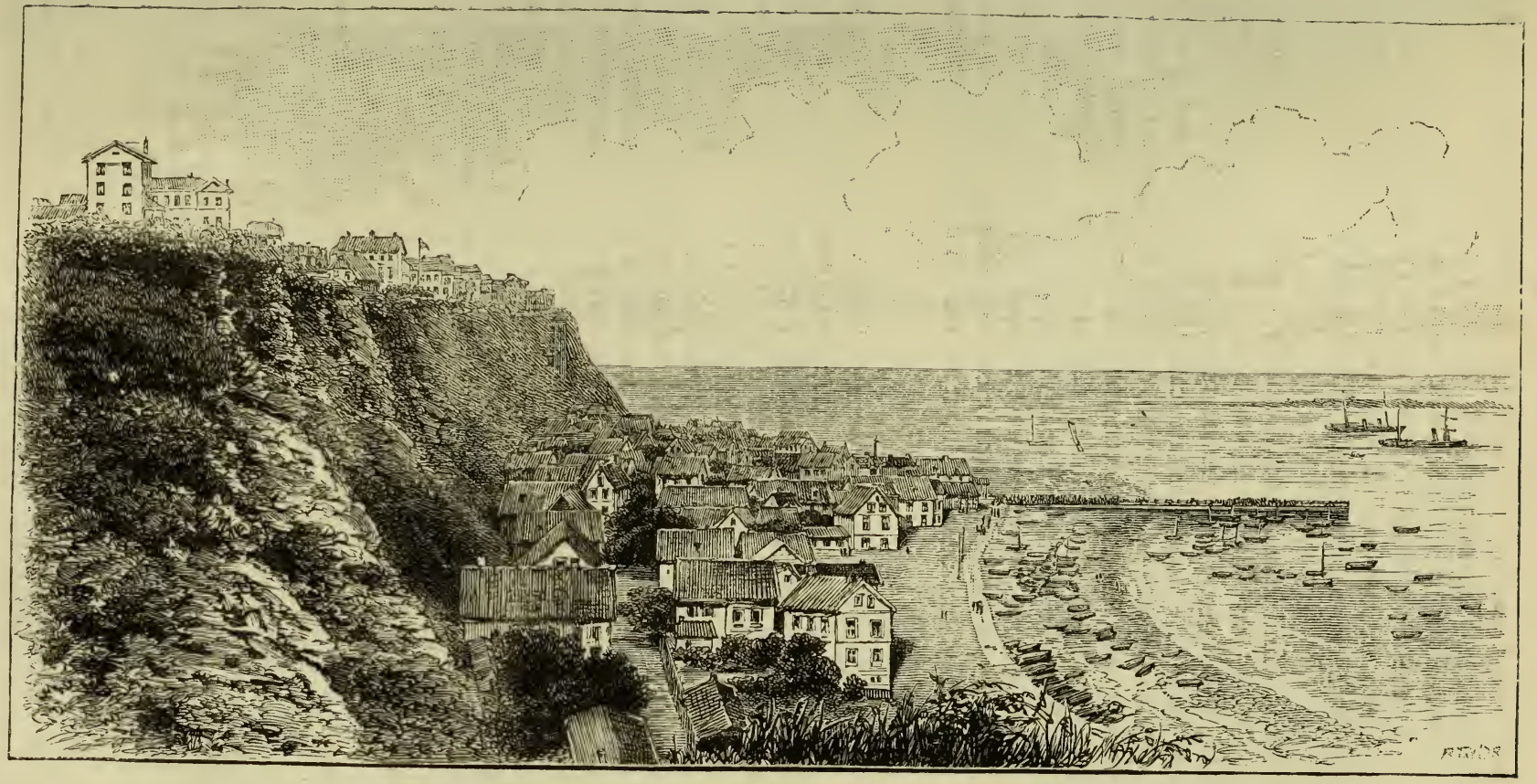
C. grew pale and nervous, and no wonder. He thought we were going to the bottom.

I thought so too. We never for a moment expected to reach Heligoland. What the old German skipper thought we could not tell, for it was impossible to get at him. C. went below. He was preparing to go down the companion-ladder gently and with care, when a lurch took him off his feet, and he suddenly found himself sprawling at the bottom. He was not in fragments, he assured me in hollow tones, but felt like it; a leg here and an arm there. He felt frightfully ill; still more terrified. The sea struck the sides of the vessel with a sound like momentary hundred-ton guns going off; and with every strike she shivered and vibrated as if she would go to pieces.

I have never felt fear before; but I felt it then, though I took care not to show it. With the cabin swimming in water; with everything smashing and whirling about; with sea after sea swirling over the decks, or striking the sides; with the wind roaring and whistling and shrieking like all the demons of Pandemonium at their worst—there was every excuse for a gloomy and depressing view of affairs. I had never been a thousand miles under the sea, like Jules Verne, but I already felt quite half way there.

It was my duty and privilege to try and administer consolation to C.; to pretend a security I certainly did not feel. From the depths of far off and apparently expiring eyes, he murmured that at least we should die together. I felt this a very poor consolation, much as I appreciated him.

At last he said he could stand this living tomb no longer. He must go on deck, and have the best and the worst before him. In vain I told him that all the elements were battling in fury, and he would either be blown overboard, or swept overboard, or rolled overboard. He crawled up, and managed to reach the man at the wheel. There he took up his station; he on one side the wheel, the man on the other side. The waves broke over him and drenched him through and through, but there he remained. Every



HELIGOLAND, LOOKING TOWARDS SANDY ISLAND.

now and then I went up to see if he was still on board, and each time I found he had never moved.

It seemed an eternity, and yet it lasted only two or three hours. By and by the moment-guns ceased and the vessel appeared to right herself, and a great calm fell upon us. We were under the lee of Heligoland, between the islands. The vessel was not a wreck: we were.

We had to land in small boats, and it was quite a long row to the pier. As for our luggage, we must trust to chance for its showing up in due time. As it turned out we had to wait for it a very undue time. Boat after boat came up containing everything *but* our goods and chattels. At length, quite an hour and a half after we had landed, they seemed to cease altogether, and we made up our minds that ill-fate had maliciously disposed of our property at Cuxhaven, and that we were now not as well provided for travelling even as Sydney Smith. But just as we were turning away in despair, or something very like it, a solitary boat once more shot out from the shore, and to our joy and consolation, it contained our, for the moment, priceless treasures.

Our first view of Heligoland was, of course, received under difficulties; our first impressions could scarcely be agreeable. And yet we were altogether filled with thanksgiving that our terrible journey was safely over. The little island before us sank there and then into our hearts as a very haven of refuge.

It was indeed nothing less; for I verily and indeed believe that had the journey lasted much longer, if the boat had not gone to the bottom, we should. No doubt we presented miserable objects; woe-begone, pallid-hued, sorrowful-faced; with drenched garments hanging about us. But a man going to execution, or one just restored from the grave, thinks nothing of his appearance (I would not say as much for the fair sex), and there was no one to see us, and we cared only for the fact that we were safe. We "clasped hands close and fast" in an impulse of mutual congratulation, and felt that life had still something worth living for.

As we left the ship, Heligoland rose up before us, like a huge rock in the midst of the sea, around which the waves for ever lash and roar. Our boat shot up to the pier, and it would be difficult to describe our sensations on once more finding ourselves on terra firma instead of at the bottom of the deep blue sea. C. went quite mad, threw his cap into the air, danced a Swedish hornpipe; and, had we been quite alone, would have turned a summersault. That he reserved for the privacy of his own apartment, where he went through a whole acrobatic performance.

Luckily we had telegraphed for rooms, and when we had mounted the cliff and reached the *Stadt London*, we found the landlord ready to receive us. The two best rooms in his hotel were

at our disposal, but only for five days. At the end of that time a family from Austria were coming to take possession of them for six weeks. They had engaged them a month ago. So the fame of Heligoland had reached even to Austria. And well it might.

Now began for us ten of the pleasantest days imaginable. The life was absolutely free and unconventional. There was an old-fashioned air, a want of ceremony about the very inn itself, that was extremely refreshing. We entered at once into the dining-room, which was furnished with a number of small tables. At the farther end was a bar, behind which the landlord dispensed his favours in the form of spirits, wines and beer. We reached our rooms upstairs by a dark, old-fashioned, winding staircase of eccentric construction, which none but the most sober could possibly ascend. We of course never found the slightest difficulty in the matter. But excesses of all kinds are unknown in Heligoland. There cannot be a prison; and if there is a policeman, he is for ornament, not use. The people all sleep with their doors wide open, and nothing comes in but the fresh air.

Most people have a very wrong idea about Heligoland. We had until we went there and saw for ourselves. We had been told that it consisted of a barren rock, containing half-a-dozen houses and a dozen coastguardsmen. That these poor benighted men had no one but each other with whom to exchange an idea from January to December; and that if they were not moved every three years they became idiotic for want of fresh food for the mind. All this we found as far from the truth as history and report so often are.

Heligoland consists of a rock with a large extent of flat table-land. It is divided into two towns or settlements: the upper and the lower. The lower town is built upon a stretch of beach under shelter of the cliffs. It is on the sea level, or almost so, and consists of a number of streets planned without any regard to regularity. The houses are low, seldom more than of two storeys. Like the letters of the alphabet, they are of varying forms and sizes, so that the stiffness of uniformity is avoided.

This is the most frequented part of Heligoland. Here are all the shops of the place: and for Heligoland, they are quite grand and important. Here Dr. Lindemann, the only doctor in the place, has his local habitation; and a very pleasant and agreeable man we found him, with physic at his fingers' ends: music and languages also. We had to consult him; for C., having imprudently exposed himself on board to the wild waves, of course fell a victim to an attack of acute rheumatism in the small of the back, which for three days necessitated massage, vapour baths, and a precautionary envelopment of sixteen yards of red flannel.

It was great fun to see him groaning and writhing under the doctor's hands, whilst massage was going on. But it had the desired effect; for at the end of the said three days, he became once more

what has been before now described as mens sana in corpore sano. Who, indeed, would not soon become thus in Heligoland, no matter how deep-seated the evil?

This lower part of Heligoland also contains the Casino. It is quite a large and important building—for Heligoland. The down-stairs rooms are given up to cafés and restaurants, to eating, drinking and smoking, and conversation more or less varied and intellectual.

At night a band plays in the large restaurant, and people sit about at small tables, and laugh and talk, and drink wine and beer, and listen occasionally to the sweet strains—for it is a band worthy of attention. In an adjoining room others are going in for heavy suppers, succeeded by ghastly dreams and awful nightmares: and, as the years creep on, a ponderosity, not of mind, but of material.

For Heligoland has one fatal drawback—let it at once be stated: as a warren is overrun with rabbits, so Heligoland is overrun with Germans.

The upper rooms of the Casino are the general assembly rooms, where people sit and talk, and where music may often be heard. Any visitor who is a musician may charm his hearers by the hour together, as he sits at the grand piano and discourses Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. Many an hour were we so charmed ourselves.

This lower part of Heligoland is also its least pleasant part. It seems crowded, and often is so. There is a slight feeling of confinement and suffocation about it, as if the winds of heaven had not free play. This is partly fancy, partly real. It is due to the confined area of the settlement, and to the fact of its being under the cliff. The place, too, is full of small inns and restaurants, which give it a slightly disagreeable air; something like the impression one gathers in one part of Jersey, where every other house seems an inn; until, when we were there, we trembled to think what Jersey must be in the popular months of the year.

Passing down the main street of Heligoland, beyond the Casino, you reach the pier. It is a very good one, but unfortunately the shallow water will not permit a vessel of any size to approach it. So everyone has to land in the detestable fashion of small boats, which is enough to keep some people from ever visiting the island. But even this is better than the custom of Tangiers, where too often you have to submit to the humiliation of reaching the shore pick-a-pack fashion.

The pier is crowded at all times with Germans. You hear nothing but German spoken. An Englishman is a rarity in Heligoland, although it belongs to England, has an English governor, is under English laws, and is watched over by an English coastguard.

In most of the shops they speak English, and in many of them they are English; but the visitors, almost without exception, are German. Now the Germans en voyage have a way of asserting

themselves which is not agreeable to the more modest, better behaved Englishman. They make their presence felt. The world was made for them ; or at least everything in it that is worth having ; no one else must have it : whilst their voices, if bottled up in the

HELIGOLAND—"WHERE THE WILD BIRDS BUILD AND SING."

phonograph, would even after the lapse of a hundred years, drive you mad on being, like Lord Bateman, released from close confinement.

But we would speak of the charms of Heligoland, not its drawbacks. Every rose must have its thorn, though every thorn has not

its rose—alas, no! Let us then be thankful for the rose, and lose sight of the thorn.

The white sands of Heligoland are covered with chairs, with small tents, with wooden structures, which on a dark night look like cowled monks and nuns in solemn conclave, silent of course as substantial ghosts revisiting the earth. There is no bathing here, which is a great charm and advantage. The view of the lovely sea is uninterrupted; the noise and confusion of bathing exists not; ugly, obtruding machines are nowhere. The sands are crowded; but everyone is reading or talking, or dreaming or flirting. Organ grinders and negro melodists have never disturbed the sands of Heligoland. May they never do so.

There is bathing, naturally, but it is carried on elsewhere. Everyone who wants to bathe must take a sea voyage. True, it is not a long voyage, occupying only five or seven minutes or so, according to wind and tide. It all takes place on the small island opposite. Standing at the end of the pier, the small island stretches before you like a bank of sand. It boasts a restaurant, a bathing establishment, and other erections of a similar nature. But it has no houses in which you can lodge. You cannot take up your abode here: you may eat, drink and bathe; you cannot sleep.

Here, too, on Sandy Island, are bathing machines innumerable. One side is devoted to the ladies; the other side, to the gentlemen. The Germans are particular in these matters. They are not like the French, who hold receptions and dance quadrilles and waltzes in the water. Between the islands, substantial boats, capable of holding a dozen or twenty people, are constantly sailing to and fro, always crowded. Ladies and gentlemen are allowed to mix in the boats; they may do so on the sea, though not in it. Germans know exactly where to draw the line.

We did not. For the first time we landed on the little bathing island, we turned to the left and went amongst the ladies' machines; of course quite unconscious of what we were doing. The respectability of our appearance and the innocence of our expressions ought to have been sufficient guarantee for the honourableness of our intentions; but they were not. The bathing woman—a she-dragon, with petticoats like the dome of St. Paul's and a hat like Robinson Crusoe's umbrella—rushed after us, with arms flying and voice shrieking. If we had been crocodiles from the Indian Ocean or bears from the North Pole invading these sacred precincts, she could not have shown greater consternation.

I stood for a moment, covered with modest confusion at the mistake we had made; whilst C. laughed in the woman's face in the most exasperating manner, until I thought he would have died of convulsions and she of rage. She looked round helplessly, as if for a policeman; forgetting, in her heat and horror, that such a thing as a man had never yet been known to invade the ladies' quarters.

However, our wits and confidence returned to us. We were both armed with instantaneous photographic machines: C. with a German camera bought in Hamburg; I with one of Watson's, bought in London. Whilst I successfully took the ladies bobbing up and down in the water: after the ridiculous and insane fashion of most ladies when bathing, formi ng a ring, and going round and round, as if playing at a sort of German "Here we go round the mulberry tree:" C. was equally successful in taking the infuriated bathing woman. For my part, I am not sure that I was not guilty of involuntary woman-slaughter; for one bobbing Hebe, catching sight of me and no doubt taking me for a crocodile from the Indian Ocean, bobbed under the water and never came up again. For all I know, she is there still.

It is very delicious bathing here in fine weather. The sands are white and soft; the water is clear. Across there lies Heligoland, to give life and animation to the scene. Its cliffs rise sheer out of the water; its little nucleus of houses is faint and indistinct; its church spire and lighthouse alone stand out conspicuously as they point upwards. The eye follows the direction insensibly, and rests upon a sky blue and serene; bracing and beautiful, as these northern skies always are.

It is intense pleasure only to throw yourself down upon the glistening sands, and listen to the water as it gently laps about you, and quietly but surely creeps upwards; until it conquers, and you have to shift your position. It is intense rest and pleasure; and if you could only have it to yourself, or with a few chosen companions, it would be indescribably delicious—Elysium. For health-restoring virtues, it can scarcely have its equal.

The rocks of Heligoland are very fine and grand in their way. They will not compare with those of Shetland, or even Sark, but I don't know any that will; and comparisons after all are odious.

These of Heligoland are only to be seen and appreciated by sailing round the island in a small boat. On a calm day, when you can sail or row under them, they look imposing and majestic, and are quite equal to any rocks to be found in England. Here the wild birds build and sing, but we were disappointed at their scarcity. It is possible that the loud voices of the Germans are too much for them, and during the summer they migrate to some less popular island in the North Sea.

Nothing can be more delightful than to spend hours upon the water under the shadow of these rocks, listening to the cry of the birds; leading an absolutely lazy, restful life: the delicious sensation of doing nothing: an Elysian existence only to be appreciated by those who at other times of the year do too much. The sun sparkles and flashes upon the water; the winds of heaven blow upon you "with a sweet emotion;" and with a sympathetic companion, such as C. at all times proves himself, life leaves little to be desired.

But the most favoured spot in Heligoland is, after all, its summit. We felt this more strongly each day as the days passed. We grew to love it with by no means "a mute affection."

Every morning as we left the hotel and turned on to the breezy heights, we seemed to become animated with life and health and keen enjoyment and wild spirits. Here, too, we had the unspeakable advantage of comparative solitude. We could throw ourselves down on the green turf, or at the edge of the cliffs, and few people molested our solitary reign.

"Rocks Ahead," Heligoland.

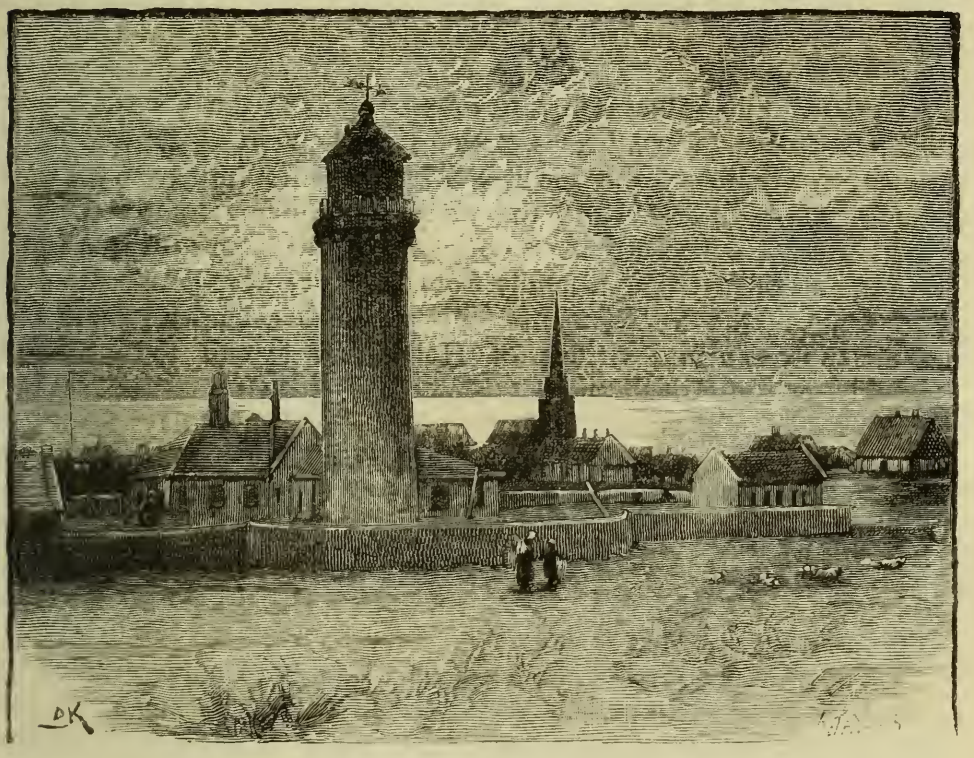
I have seldom felt anything like the air of Heligoland on these breezy heights. If anyone were dying, I think it would restore them to life.

There you are, on a table-land of rock reaching high out of the water, in the midst of the bracing North Sea. For miles and miles, nothing intervenes between you and the free winds of heaven. Everything that these winds contain that is healthful and bracing and life-restoring, is yours. Jaded nerves feel the influence, and thrill and respond to it, as the strings of a harp vibrate and respond to the touch of the hand. You have an immense, unbroken sweep and circle of horizon all round you. You feel very far above the world; and, what is still better, very far out of the world.

In point of fact you really are so, up here, in this solitude. The sea, flashing in the sunlight, is very far down. The little boats upon

it look like cockle-shells. Across there, on Sandy Island, the bathing-machines appear as sentry-boxes, the bathers so many floats upon the water. The pier and sands of Heligoland are crowded, but that does not in the least affect us up here. We cannot even catch the faintest whisper of German voices. The Fraus must be dozing, the Fräuleins taking the opportunity to flirt in whispers.

All round about us the grass is emerald green. The eye rests upon it with a sense of pleasure and repose. An old rhyme says that in Heligoland, green is the land, red are the rocks, white is



ON THE HEIGHTS OF HELIGOLAND.

the sand. It is quite true ; and it at once brings before you a picture of what Heligoland really is.

Rising out of this emerald green is the pure white lighthouse, with its surrounding walls and houses. One of the light-keepers is the photographer of the place, and he has attained a perfection in his art that would do credit to Bond Street or Piccadilly. We told him he was lost and wasted here ; but he was wise, and quoted the old proverb about a bird in the hand. It is after all the rock on which so many have wrecked prosperity ; this hasting to be rich ; this want of that contentment which is great gain. To know how to wait is no doubt the great secret of success in life.

You can walk round the whole island in little more than an hour. Only a small portion of the summit is built upon. The streets, or lanes, or thoroughfares (one hardly knows what to call such quaint

constructions) are narrow and irregular. The houses are low, many of them being nothing but bungalows: country-looking cottages of the humblest description. Those facing the sea are a little more imposing. They nearly all let lodgings, even the smallest and humblest; and in summer you can scarcely find a room for love or money: certainly not for love.

We found ourselves buffeted about, even during our short stay there. Our rooms, as the landlord informed us, were let at the end of five days; and when the five days came to an end, we had to turn out. Where the small army from Austria that turned in stowed itself away, puzzled us much more than how the treasures come out of the conjurer's hat.

We had to go and search, and found rooms at the Villa Eugenie, the best house in the place, close to the governor's house. The rooms were quite stylishly furnished, but were not much larger than good-sized wardrobes; and the motherly landlady informed us in tones of real concern that we could only have them for three days. At the end of that time a family from Hungary were coming to take possession of them. By all the saints in the calendar, where else would the fame and virtues of Heligoland extend to? Siberia, possibly, or the Himalayas.

But half a loaf is better than no bread, and three days formed a considerable portion of our remaining time in Heligoland. We took possession. The good woman said that we could have coffee in the morning. We tried it the first morning, but we never tried it again. Her rooms were perfection; she was goodness itself; but her coffee was wormwood. We slept at the Villa Eugenie, but lived at the hotel.

There were two girls at the hotel who interested us very much by reason of their quaintness. We invariably saw them at lunch time, and our tables were not far from each other. They were German, and very ugly. We never saw them speak to a soul the whole time of our sojourn. They conversed in wonderful undertones, and were as quiet as mice in their movements. We never spoke to them once, nor they to us. They seemed particularly shy and modest, and never lifted their eyes from their plates. Once something that happened outside caused everyone to laugh. They looked up and caught our eyes, and blushed furiously for three days afterwards: a fixed flush. They were both about twenty-three, and if they lived upon sauerkraut, it agreed with them wonderfully, for we never could quite decide which measured most—their breadth or their height. They always looked as happy as the day was long, and would go out in the hottest, finest weather with waterproof cloaks and umbrellas, comfortably tucked up, arm-in-arm. We felt quite sure they were teachers from some school in Germany, quietly and sensibly passing their holidays. And anyone desiring health and fresh air, all the delights of sea and sky and freedom, having

only a certain capital at command, could not do better than spend their holiday in Heligoland. If it does not brace them up, mentally and physically, then no place on the face of the earth will do it.

At the end of three days we had to turn out of the Villa Eugenie to make room for the Hungarian family, whom we devoutly wished at the Antipodes—or even still further off.

This time we had hard work in finding a resting-place for the soles of our feet. We had to come down in the world. Having occupied the best house in the place, we now had to put up with about the most humble. However, cleanliness is the first consideration; and our humble rooms were swept and garnished, our beds might have been wrapped in lavender, and our landlady was the most willing old soul in creation. It was only for two days, and they passed only too soon.

There is a lift that takes you from the top to the bottom of the cliffs, and as we went down it for the last time we felt almost melancholy. We had spent so free and happy a time in Heligoland that we left it with vivid regret. Instead of ten days, we wished we had arranged for as many weeks. The days were full of sunshine, the nights warm and brilliant. We had interludes of delicious music; and to sit at night in the large restaurant, and listen to the band, and watch all the people with their funny ways and extraordinary costumes, was the greatest fun imaginable. Then everything was conducted on the early-closing principle; for at ten o'clock the band would depart, and a few minutes after the place would be shut up for the night. There was absolutely nothing to be done, except walk the pier under the stars or go to bed.

We have mentioned the coastguard elsewhere. In summer time there is no danger of their dying of mental asphyxia, but in winter they are more to be pitied. Every one has left, the place is deserted, the houses are nearly all closed. The island is silent and solitary as a tomb. I had been told that it was a charity to send out papers or anything readable to the poor coastguardsmen of Heligoland. I accordingly regularly sent them out sundry contributions that I thought might interest them. Others did the same. But when I visited the island and came to inquire into the matter, to my righteous indignation I found that none of these things ever reached them. They were regularly and systematically taken and kept by others, who were quite able to afford these luxuries for themselves; and the poor coastguardsmen had to go without. I immediately stopped my supplies.

But the day we left there was no sign of winter or desolation. It was bright and glorious summer. Heligoland, its pier and beach, and Sandy Island opposite—all was crowded with a laughing, chattering, happy congregation.

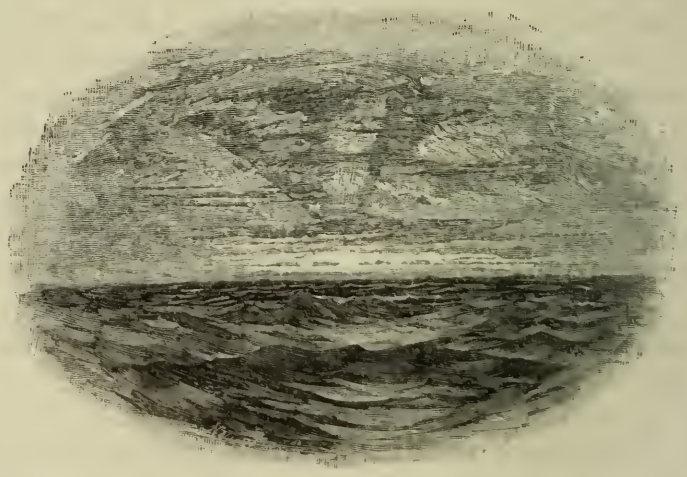
The island belongs to England, and it costs the nation ever so much to keep it up; and this we appear to do for the benefit

of the Germans. For my own part, I would levy a tax upon them, just as they do in many of their towns upon the English. Small blame if they appreciate Heligoland and flock thither in shoals throughout the summer, but they ought to pay for their privilege.

Heligoland is no doubt too far away, too inaccessible, ever to be patronised very much by the English—unless a regular system of boats were organised between it and England. And why not? It would undoubtedly become popular: only, the bathing-machines of Sandy Island would have to be utilised as sleeping apartments; and Dr. Lindemann would have to take a partner; and Government House would have to expand itself: and I fear that our solitary reign on the breezy heights would be not only disturbed, like the owl's reign in the ivy-mantled tower, but become altogether a remembrance of the past.

We sadly felt that our stay in Heligoland was of the past as we jumped into the boat and were swiftly rowed towards the steamer: even then blowing her whistle for departure. Before long the island had faded from sight. The boat was crowded, and many of the passengers were for Cuxhaven. But before reaching it, the sea had become so rough that it was impossible to land them, and they had to be taken on to Hamburg.

To us the noise and confinement of the great town seemed intolerable after the freshness and freedom of Heligoland. C. had formed quite different plans, but once more, like Rachel, he declared he would not leave me: and before very long we again found ourselves ploughing the rough waters of the North Sea, with the charms of Norway awaiting us.



STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

HOW WE WON THE ELECTION.

By Sydney Hodges.

IT was the time of Sir G. H.'s election at D——, more years ago than I care to count.

Party feeling ran high. We knew the contest would be a close one; that we should have to strain every nerve, and bring up every available man if we wished to win.

Elections were much more lively affairs at that time than in these orderly days. The free and independent electors were not particular as to the kind of missiles with which they favoured their opponents. After a scrimmage, eggs of an inferior quality were usually scarce. Torn shirts and broken heads were quite "en règle." Weak-kneed electors were locked up in top rooms until they were conveyed to the poll, so that the other side might not "get at" them. A favourite device at D—— was to take them out in a boat for the day, and bring them in just in time to poll. If a boat belonging to the other side approached, the plan was to put the "free and independents" flat down in the bottom of the boat, otherwise there was a chance of a naval engagement.

I was a young man at the time. My father-in-law was one of Sir G. H.'s leading supporters, consequently I was dragged into the mêlée, and enjoyed it thoroughly.

I was engaged at the time on a portrait of Governor H——, for the town hall of D——. "The Governor," as he was called, was the last of a long line of governors of the castle. The post—a sinecure in his time—was abolished at the passing of the Reform Bill, but Governor H—— was allowed to retain the empty dignity for his life.

He was a splendid specimen of the "fine old English gentleman." He had represented D—— for years before the Reform Bill. A talk with him was like reading a page of remote history.

His house was situated on the wooded shores of the river D——, near the entrance to the exquisite harbour. The house itself was full of interest. It contained, among other things, the veritable mantelpiece beside which Sir Walter Raleigh smoked his first pipes in England.

At the time I painted him, however, the Governor had been compelled by bad health to remove to a drier situation, and had taken a house at a fashionable watering place ten miles distant. He still

resided there at the time of the election, but was, of course, a voter for the borough of D——.

A somewhat lively incident brightened up the morning of the election. A retired barrister, resident in the neighbourhood, who was gifted with an irrepressible loquacity, and who was one of our bitterest opponents, was addressing a few last words to the "free and independents" from the window of the Castle Hotel. Wishing to give a practical illustration of the blessings of free trade to the crowd below, he sent for a large and a small loaf, and launched them from the window into the midst of the throng. Unhappily the small loaf gave a hot protectionist a rather severe crack on the head, and without a moment's hesitation he picked it up and sent it flying back again. It smashed through the glass of the side sashes of the bow window from which the orator was holding forth. By a fatal mistake one of the orator's friends picked up the loaf and hurled it once more on to the heads of the crowd. This was enough. There happened to be a baker's cart passing at the time. The chance was too good to be lost. The protectionists made a rush for the cart, and sent the whole of its contents in through the window, smashing every pane of glass, and causing the orator and his friends to beat a hasty and by no means dignified retreat. Then the usual free fight took place on the quay, and the edge of the quay was converted into a temporary Tarpeian rock, and was applied to the same purpose as the one of old.

The polling was pretty close all day. At one o'clock my father-in-law, who had been cheerful all the morning, began to look serious. As I entered the Committee Room I read anxiety on every brow.

Said John B——, a lawyer of the town, "we shall want every available vote."

"And we must have them, too," said my father-in-law. "We can't afford to run any risks. We must get the Governor over somehow. Who'll go for him?"

"I will," said I, "if I can get something decent to ride."

"My horse is in Brown's stable," said B——, "as fresh as a lark. He'll carry you over in three quarters of an hour."

"He must do it, too," said I, looking at the clock, "if the Governor is to be here before the poll closes."

"It won't do for them to see you start, or they'll think we're afraid," said B——.

"Then send the horse round to the Floating Bridge." said I. "I'll run up and get a thick coat, and can be there almost as soon as the animal. This will save time."

"All right," said B——. "You'll want your coat, and no mistake," he added, glancing out of the window.

The rain had been coming down more or less the whole morning, and seemed now decidedly inclined to favour the "more." A ride of twenty miles in pelting rain was not a cheerful prospect; but I

wish I had a little of the enthusiasm now which made me rather enjoy it then.

I rushed up to my father-in-law's house and secured a coat which seemed stout enough to keep out Niagara. Then I took a short cut to the spot where the horse was to await me.

The river was crossed at that time, and I think still is, by a construction called a Floating Bridge. It was a huge machine for the conveyance of vehicles and foot passengers, worked by horses and chains. It took about ten minutes to cross the river. Every moment was of value. In those days the poll closed at four o'clock; it was now half-past one. To my great annoyance, the lumbering machine was coming slowly over in mid-stream—the man in charge of the horse having hailed it on his arrival. However, it touched the shore at last, and I mounted and rode in. One thing troubled me. It was impossible for the Governor to reach the Floating Bridge much before four. If it happened to be on the wrong side when we arrived, we were lost. This, I thought, must be provided against.

As I rode up the slope on the other side, I said to the man in charge of the bridge: "After half-past three you must keep the bridge on this side till four o'clock."

"If so be as I can, zur," he answered.

"Look here," I said, "you *must*. If you keep it here, no matter who hails you, from half-past three to ten minutes to four, there's a sovereign for you."

"All right, zur," he answered, with a knowing wink. "I'll do it."

I started. The rain was coming down faster than ever, but I was almost oblivious of the fact, so bent was I on the mission before me. I just glanced at my watch—a quarter to two. "Can I possibly do it?" I mentally exclaimed.

For the first two miles it was all uphill: not steep, but a long, steady rise. My horse felt that I meant going, and dropped into a smart canter. I knew it would not do to press him on this long rise. I had never ridden him before, but I felt that I had some good stuff under me. To my great relief, he kept up the steady pace without a touch of whip or heel; the heave of his flanks and the increasing clouds of breath coming with the regularity of a pendulum.

I eased him a moment over the top of the hill. There was a short distance of level ground, and then a gradual descent of a mile or so between hedges to the open ground called the Warborough, and after that mostly downhill and level ground all the way to T——. The road is not a frequented one, and was not in particularly good condition, but the Devonshire bred horses are used to that, and to going fast downhill.

"Now, my lad," I said, as I patted my horse's neck, "you've got your work cut out."

He seemed to understand every word. That sort of electrical influence which exists between a rider and his steed—if the latter is good for anything—was better than whip or spur. In another minute the hedges were flying past like the wind, and it seemed to be only a few moments before we were out on the open Warborough.

Here we caught it indeed. The wind swept in fierce gusts up from the sea away to the right, bringing with it torrents of blinding rain. I set my hat more firmly on my head, and bent down over my horse's neck. So fierce was the wind, however, that it seemed to make even my horse swerve, but still he kept his steady, rapid stride. At the end of the Warborough was a turnpike. The turnpikeman saw us coming, and was out with change in his hand by the time we reached the gate. I dropped him a sixpence, leaving him staring in amazement at my not stopping for the change. Onward still, along the level ground above Broad Sands, and then to the first bit of steepish downhill. The road here was washed into deep furrows by the rain, and looked rather nasty; but it was no use hesitating, and at it we both went—the horse as if he were beginning to enjoy it, and I keeping him well in hand. Away past G—— Sands, where we got more rain-laden gusts from the sea, and so into the quiet village of P——, where, not wishing to be thought quite mad, I drew rein a little, rather as I thought to my steed's disgust. When the last of the houses was passed, he broke, of his own accord, into his old plunging pace, and in ten minutes or so I was riding into the stable yard of the Royal Hotel, at T——, soaked with wet, and splashed from head to foot.

The thought had occurred to me on the way that if I went first to the Governor and then to order a carriage we could not possibly be in time. This was my motive for going straight to the Hotel. The ostler came out to take my horse—staring at horse and rider in astonishment.

"Look here!" I said, "I'm not going to get down. I want a carriage and pair sent up to Governor H.'s *at once*. Here's five shillings for you to push it on, and there'll be an extra half-sovereign for the driver if he's there in ten minutes. Good horses, mind."

"All right, sir," said the man, pocketing the coins. "It shall be there."

Five minutes after I was at the Governor's door. Captain, now Admiral, G——, a great friend of the former, who was staying in the house, saw me from the window. He followed the servant to the door, staring at me in amazement.

"Why, H——, what on earth does this mean?"

"It means that the Governor must come at once or we may lose the election."

"But he can't be there in time."

"Yes, he can. A carriage will be here in five minutes. We shall have an hour to do it in, *and it must be done*."

"Well, come in, at any rate, until he's ready. Why, you must be soaked."

"I am—rather," I answered as I dismounted. A man came to the horse's head, and then for the first time I realised how wet I was. I literally staggered beneath the weight of my saturated coat. The next minute, however, I was by a bright fire, and indulging in hot whisky and water.

The Governor pulled a long face when he heard the news, but he was too staunch a man to desert us in an emergency in spite of his years. In ten minutes he was in the carriage and rolling along over the roads towards D——.

I need not narrate the incidents of the return. I cantered gaily behind the carriage, occasionally drawing up beside the driver to keep him going. As we approached the Floating Bridge I was stirred by anxiety. Would the man in charge keep his word or baulk us? At the turn of the road which brought it in sight my heart throbbed violently. Thank heaven, it was there!

I drew a long breath of relief and looked at my watch. Eighteen minutes to four. We were on the bridge and over it in ten minutes. Five more would take the carriage to the Market Square, where the polling booth was. I followed it till it turned into the square, then rode into the inn-yard, fairly done. Leaving the horse to the ostler, I entered an empty sitting-room, feeling quite sick and faint. I sat down in an easy-chair by the fire, meaning to rest a moment, but in an instant I was fast asleep.

I was awakened by the shouts from the Market Place, and started up. The rain had ceased—I rushed over to the square. At the entrance of the booth I met my father-in-law. I saw success in his face.

"All right," he said. "We've carried our man."

"By how many?" I gasped.

"By *one*," he answered, with a look of triumph.

The ride had done it.

YOUR CHRISTMAS CARD.

Do you need it—this reminder—
That my heart is all with you?
Has your sight grown shorter, blinder?
Do my accents ring less true?
As absurd to light a taper,
When the sun is full in view,
As to think that paint and paper
Can unite us—yet they do!

If I did not send the message
(Christmas finds me on my guard),
You would take it as a presage
That my heart was growing hard.
"Cruel! base!" I hear you crying,
"Double-natured as the pard;
Even grudging one the buying
Of a simple Christmas Card!"

So I ponder at the counter
Where the witching wares are spread;
And the shopman, as I flounder,
Smiles serenely o'er my head.
Well he knows my annual flurry—
Choosing, changing, growing red—
At the last, in direst hurry,
Taking something else instead!

Not a dog, and not a daisy,
Not an angel, or an ape;
Not a landscape blurred and hazy,
With a church all out of shape;
Not an etching of the river,
Not a rosebud made in crèpe;
Nor a cat, whose tail will quiver
When you pull an end of tape!

Nothing vulgar, nothing silly,
Nothing that was out last year;
Why, you cut your cousin Willy
For a turkey drinking beer!
And you snubbed your uncle's curate
Since his card bore, all too clear,
"Sophy's lo—" Who could endure it?
Ending in an obvious smear!

'Tis a task beyond my powers,
I must ask the shopman's aid;
Business-like he sorts the flowers
Where my bungling fingers strayed,
Finds me something "chaste and novel,"
Eros busy with a spade;
Known as "*Cherubim and Shovel*"
To the dealers and the trade!

When in glad anticipation
Envelopes are torn away,
Will your quick imagination
Guess what Cupid comes to say?
Ah! thro' many drear Decembers
I'm content this part to play,
If you'll whisper "He remembers
What I like on Christmas Day!"

G. B. Stuart.

TRUTH.

THE Recorder of the City of London remarked, on presenting the Lord Mayor Elect—Mr. Alderman Whitehead—to the Lord Chancellor, that he was descended from Mr. George Whitehead, the father of Quakerism, who was associated with Penn and Fox in the perils and pains of persecution in the cause of truth and religious liberty.

To which the Lord Chancellor pertinently replied "that the form of heroism changes from age to age, but the spirit remains the same; and I doubt not that if occasion should arise the same adherence to what is believed to be the truth, and the same determination to seek the truth would be found as much in a modern Lord Mayor as in the case of the ancestors from whom he claimed descent."

This suggested the question that follows:—

What is Truth?

It may appear strange that such a question should remain to be asked; yet probably has no one word in the English, or its representative in other languages, been more misused and abused.

One of the definitions given by lexicographers of truth is Conformity of words to thoughts. If this were admitted as the ne plus ultra of truth, it would save all metaphysical discussion as to the meaning of the word. Then again we are told that truth is conformity to reality, and reality exacts concordance to that which was, is, or must be—a true state of facts or things.

This is a more philosophical definition; for we cannot be far wrong, so long as we limit ourselves to an exact statement of what was, is, or must be. The only drawback to its completeness is that people do not agree, not only upon what was, but also still more so upon what is, and more than all, as to what must be.

In History, truth is a correct relation of events. In the Fine Arts, a faithful adherence in representation to the models of nature, or the prototypes on which the principles of art are founded. To say that truth is veracity is a mere play upon words. It is also used for fidelity, constancy, honesty and virtue.

Locke defined truth as the joining or separating of signs, as the things agree or disagree—a definition which is almost as difficult to understand as what is truth itself. When we are told that truth is correctness of opinion, we seem to get nearer to its meaning; but, unfortunately, opinions differ. There are no two persons who hold precisely the same opinion, and as it is often difficult to decide as to which is the more correct, we are in reality as far off from finding out the truth as we were before.

The word truth is, in fact, used in so many senses, and in such a variety of acceptations, that it seems to be incapable of being defined; or, like a will-o'-the-wisp, to elude us all the more when we think we hold it in our grasp. A person avers a thing to be true, another denies it. Both cannot be right. All things are true till they are proved to be erroneous or false; and the number of established or accepted truths will be found, on careful inspection, to come more within the province of science than of metaphysics, philosophy, or even religion.

Although the first to declare that the earth moves round the sun was incarcerated for his heterodoxy, the fact is now admitted as an accepted truth. What was heterodoxy at one time may now be orthodoxy, and one person's orthodoxy is some other person's heterodoxy.

No one will deny that the sun shines. That is a scientific fact attested by the senses of all, and therefore not open to diversity of opinion. But say that a thing is beautiful or admirable, you will have as many different opinions as if you were to proclaim any particular man to be clever, or any particular woman to be fair. Matters that are open to capacity or soundness of judgment, or to perfection and cultivation of tastes, are not admitted as truths; they are open to too many differences of opinion.

The senses determine nothing. Some people love music, others detest it. Some people delight in a fragrance that is repulsive to others. Some people are delighted with natural objects that have no charm in the eyes of others. What is pleasant to the feeling of some is disagreeable to that of others. The eloquence that stirs up the sympathies of some will be utterly wasted or lost upon others. There is no truth in the senses beyond the fact that the thing is. The aspect in which the same thing is looked upon varies with the intelligence, the cultivation, and the susceptibility of the senses. These may, in some instances, be natural gifts; as in judging of form, place or distance—the gifts of a geographer: or determining weight, adaptability or power—the gifts of the mechanician. The senses of humour or of music are gifts; and so also success in art, literature, poetry, or science must depend upon the gift of a perfection in certain faculties greater than that with which the commonalty are endowed. There is no perfect truth in such gifts; there is only an approximation to the attainment of such.

Truth is in the Spirit of God, and in all that He has created. It exists also in the Spirit that moves within us, but not in the manifestations of it as vouchsafed to mortal man. It exists in the Natural Laws, as also in the moral and intellectual constitution of man; but it is ever debased, corrupted or falsified by the frailty and perversity of human nature. People are always crying out for truth, proclaiming truth, quarrelling or fighting for truth, yet have they no common or distinct idea or knowledge of what truth is.

In Scripture Jesus Christ is called "The Truth." In the Koran Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel are adduced as the only exponents of God's truth. There was a time when martyrdom was suffered to attest the strength of conviction in the truth of the one, and the sword was the argument used to enforce conviction in the truth of the other. Yet both admitted, and admit, the existence of God above all, and will yet only see the truth through the medium of their own convictions.

In a religious sense truth is simply what any person believes in, or has faith in. But as no two persons can be found to agree in believing in precisely the same thing, or form of thing; and as nations, as well as individuals, all differ in opinions, beliefs and faiths, it logically follows that truth, over and above the belief in One God, is to each person that which he or she believes in.

Hence it is that proverbial philosophy says so truly "Truth lies in a well." It is a thing unknown to and invisible to the mass of mankind. Nor will truth ever be found until all people are united in one common opinion that it is only to be sought for and only exists in the SPIRIT OF GOD, as pervading nature and inspiring mankind.

SENEX.

HUSBAND TO WIFE.

WHEN thou art here I look into thy face,
And in thine eyes, and find a beauty there
Surpassing any other, the most fair,
That lives in classic lips and lines of grace:
For while thou hast the beauty that we trace
In form and feature, and in brows and hair,
A deeper charm, a loveliness more rare,
Beams from thy soul and beautifies thy place.
And when thou art away, my heart's sole queen,
That beauty like a presence day and night
Dwells with me, and thou art, as thou hast been,
My constant angel, ever wise and bright;
My guide, while not another stands between,
Nor any eyes but thine have been my light.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

CHRISTMAS IN A SNOWDRIFT.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion," &c.

SCENE: The Departure Platform of King's Cross Station. Time: 9.30 a.m. on a certain dull, cold 24th of December. The Scotch Express is getting up steam; great piled-up trucks of luggage are being whirled madly, yet withal with method in their madness, along the platform. A little crowd is besieging the bookstall: bawling boys are driving a thriving trade in the morning papers.

A man-servant of weather-beaten aspect, evidently an old soldier, is waiting his master's coming, with coats and wraps, outside a first-class carriage. It is already occupied by an ancient ecclesiastic, who has reached the dignity of silken hose; a lady in black, scarcely passed her première jeunesse; and a boy of twelve or thirteen, who treats the absent traveller's impedimenta to a close scrutiny, and has time to read the name, "Colonel Pomeroy, Wessex Regt.," boldly blazoned in white upon portmanteau and hat-box, before the arrival of their owner.

He came up at last with a quick, commanding tread. A tall, soldierly figure, with close-cropped head, and keen eyes looking out from under dark, straight brows, which, like the heavy moustachios, were already tinged with grey. The man-servant stepped forward, saluting. "Everything is in, sir."

His master frowned. "Isn't there an empty compartment, Gough?"

"No, sir; the train is very full this morning; but I believe most of them get out at York," indicating the occupants of the carriage with a jerk of his elbow.

"Very well. Give me my ulster; it's bitterly cold."

As the bell sounded, he stepped into the carriage, a figure clad from head to foot in rough grey frieze; and, eschewing the neighbourhood of the old churchman, seated himself opposite the lady in black, whose thick gossamer travelling veil revealed little of her features. The lad sat close beside her, and it was pretty to see his boyish devotion to his frail-looking companion, who seemed full young to be his mother. Yet such was the relationship between them.

Colonel Pomeroy settled himself in his corner with the deliberate attention to comfort of an old traveller, exchanged his hat for a deer-stalker cap, wrapped his ulster coat and carriage rug well over his legs, unfolded his *Times*, and gave no more thought to his silent travelling companions, who rarely, very rarely, exchanged a word. Yet

the boy sat with wistful eyes fixed upon his mother, and the mother, putting out a tiny hand, took her son's within it and clasped it closely. They were quite free from observation. The Colonel was absorbed in Randolph Churchill's latest philippic, the ecclesiastic was occupied in mentally arranging his moves at the next Chapter meeting, as the express rushed on hour after hour through the dreary winter landscape.

The Colonel put down his paper at last, consulted his watch, and rejoiced that he had run through already nearly four hours of his journey. "We are nearing York," he said half aloud. Mother and son exchanged glances, and drew, if possible, even closer together. Colonel Pomeroy intercepted the look, and began to feel the languid, half insouciant interest in his fellow travellers which we take in the companions of a day. He offered his *Times*.

The lady declined it with a smile. "Thank you, not at present. My son and I separate at York."

The voice was sweet and low, and matched well with the fragile form. It struck some note in the soldier's memory, and sent him into a reverie as he leaned back with folded arms in his corner.

Presently he took a letter from his pocket and began to re-peruse it, for in the hurry of departure that morning the first reading had been very superficial. It was in a woman's hand, and the pith of it lay in this paragraph :

"Jack and I hope you will turn up before the Christmas season is quite over. We have not spent it together since those merry days at Blithedale before poor Alison Kerr's unlucky marriage, when you and she were the life of the party. You know her spendthrift husband is dead? But more of this anon. When you come John wants you to look at Ravensden, which is in the market just now. Why don't you buy the place and settle near us? We shall neither of us rest till you are married and as happy as we are. I know of just the woman to suit you. She is a great friend of mine, and I shall be dreadfully disappointed if you don't fall in love with each other directly you meet."

He folded up the letter with a sigh, saying to himself inwardly : "No, no. Fool that I am ! My idiotic constancy stands between me and that sort of thing. Emmie is the kindest-hearted little woman in the world, but she'll never show me anyone to banish Ailie Kerr from my memory !" And he fell a-musing again ; a reverie so retrospective and interesting that it ended only as the train glided swiftly across the levels about York, and entered the busy station with shrill shrieks and screams.

The boy took a travelling-bag and a baize-covered cricket bat from the rack above and turned to his mother. Her veil was thrown back now, and disclosed a pale, wistful face. As the train stopped she clasped him in her arms, whispering : "Good-bye, Hubert ! my own dear boy ! Write often and tell me everything."

"Good-bye, little mother! If they don't make you happy, I'll settle them!"

A parting hug and Hubert sprang down, but still lingered near the carriage. A tall, stout gentleman passing along the platform looked scrutinisingly at him, passed on, paused, returned and peered into the compartment.

"Oh! there you are! I was looking for you among the *second*-class passengers."

The Colonel, who was preparing to get out and stretch his legs, heard the remark and its answer.

"And there you would have found us but for my cousin's kindness in franking us. Hubert! come here and make your uncle's acquaintance."

"H'm. So this is Hubert! Nothing of the Lloyds about him. Favours you in appearance, I see."

"Thank you, sir," smiled Hubert, holding out his hand, though Mr. Lloyd perhaps had not intended the remark for a compliment.

"Well, boy! at any rate I hope you'll be a credit to our kindness. If you have any baggage, look it up and make the porter take it out to my trap. I'm well known here."

He drew himself up with much self-importance, bestowing a condescending look on the Colonel as he alighted, lit a cigar, and strolled away. But when the ecclesiastic appeared, his manner changed. "Ah! Mr. Archdeacon, let me help you. Are these your rugs? Cold day for a journey!"

With a parting nod to his sister-in-law, he walked away to see the dignitary to his carriage; and Hubert's mother blessed the Archdeacon in her heart, as presently her boy came flying back for a last word. The Colonel, who had driven it rather close, returned just in time to witness this second leavetaking between mother and son. Perhaps something sympathetic in the soldier's eye emboldened the boy, for as the guard came up with his key, Hubert bent forward and touched the Colonel's arm, saying eagerly, "Oh, sir! take care of my mother!"

She glanced up at Pomeroy with a tremulous smile almost of apology: "Poor boy! We have never been separated before."

"He is going to school?"

"No; to an uncle who is good enough to offer him a home."

"The gentleman who spoke to you just now?"

"Yes," and she sighed. Evidently the offer was not unmitigated good fortune.

A shrill shriek from the engine, the guard gives the signal, and as the train moves on its way there comes a call at the window again, and something falls into the lap of Colonel Pomeroy's fellow-traveller. "Just to cheer you up, little mother," cries Hubert's boyish voice.

The something being unpacked, turned out to be *Fun*, *Tit Bits*, *The Field*, and a packet of butter scotch! But the twinkle in the

Colonel's eyes was quickly suppressed. The sublime and the ridiculous are near akin, and instead of cheering his mother, as Hubert intended, her boy's curiously chosen consolation had the effect of breaking down the last remnants of her composure. She had lowered her veil again, yet the Colonel opposite could but be aware of the tears stealing down on to the *Field*, which she held upside down. The tough soldier—fierce as a lion in fight, and a stern disciplinarian in camp—had one peculiarity—he hated to see a woman cry. He fidgeted and fumed, and tugged at the ends of his moustachios.

"Have you no other children?" he asked at last, stooping to move his travelling bag out of her way, and hoping to distract her attention.

"No; he is my only one. But after all, a mother can't expect to keep her boy always tied to her apron-strings, can she? And his uncle will be kind to him; it is very ungrateful of me to mind so much." And she smiled a sweet, patient smile, which seemed to tear the stern soldier's heart-strings.

"And what becomes of you now you are alone?" he asked abruptly.

"After Christmas, I am going to take an engagement as companion which a kind cousin has secured for me. A bank broke; we are poor—almost penniless now." A faint flush rose to her cheek, for the experience was a new one. "I must work for my daily bread; but I could bear *that* if only we could have been together still!" Her voice broke and the gentle tears fell afresh.

It seemed kinder to let them have their way. So she cried silently behind the *Field*, while Colonel Pomeroy looked out of window at the dreary winter landscape, and the clouds big with threatenings of snow, and turned over in his mind all sorts of impracticable plans for helping her. He would find out her name and address and lodge a sum of money to her credit in the local bank. He would smuggle a few bank notes into her little travelling bag. He would get Jack Drummond-Orr to appoint her governess to his children at a salary of £200 a-year, paid by himself. He would—hang it! What was the use of a man coming into a fortune if he couldn't do some good with it? (For wealth was as new an experience to the poor soldier, Hubert Pomeroy, as abject poverty to his unhappy fellow-traveller.)

While with his usual impulsive, blundering generosity he hit upon and rejected a dozen different plans, the threatened snow began to fall, faster and ever faster. The prospect without did not tend to raise the spirits, and Colonel Pomeroy was relieved to find that his dejected companion had for the moment forgotten her troubles in sleep. So much he could see in the evening dusk, made darker by the heavy snow-clouds. They were crossing the Border now, hard by the iron-bound shores of the grim North Sea. The last glimmer of daylight had disappeared. It was intensely cold.

By the time Edinburgh was reached, Pomeroy was glad to warm the inner man with a good square meal, for he was not due at his friends the Drummond-Orrs' until 11 p.m. His fellow-traveller, too, enjoyed her coffee and sandwiches amid the cheerful lights of the refreshment-room, and came back with a trifle more colour in her wan cheeks. When Colonel Pomeroy rejoined her, he found, rather to his annoyance, that they were to be no longer *tête-à-tête*. A worthy north-country couple of common-place aspect had secured the two remaining corners, and were in the act of making themselves comfortable for the night journey. Both had discarded boots for easy slippers; a ginger-coloured travelling cap protected the good man's head and ears, and a huge silk handkerchief of Oriental design had replaced the conventional bonnet with his partner. Their intention of propitiating the deities of slumber was evident, and ere long successful, as the heavy breathing of both testified. Their doze was only temporarily interrupted by the halt at Stirling, where the old gentleman roused enough to growl out a hope that the snow had not blocked the lines farther north, and speedily fell asleep again.

Colonel Pomeroy's fellow-traveller looked up in dismay. "Oh! you don't think it likely, do you?" Her purse was but scantily furnished, and delay might mean expense.

"I don't know much about it," he answered kindly. "It is fifteen years and more since I last crossed the Border, and the greater part of that time has been spent in India. Do you go much farther?"

"Another two or three hours' journey. Burnside is the name of the station."

"And of mine also. That is convenient."

"I am going to spend Christmas and the New Year at a place called Ladykirk."

"What! the Drummond-Orrs?"

"Yes; the Drummond-Orrs."

"How strange! So am I!" His face distinctly brightened. "Drummond-Orr is my cousin."

"Yes?"—demurely. "*Mrs.* Drummond-Orr is *my* cousin."

He drew a long breath. "Is it possible! She had but one relation in the world! Then you are—you must be ——"

"Alison Kerr once," very faintly; "Alison Lloyd now."

There was a long silence.

She who had loved and suffered as Alison Kerr, felt her heart-beats pulsating wildly with the after-throb of an old pain. No common-place occurred to her wherewith to fill the pause.

He leant back in his corner with intent eyes fixed upon her face. "Strange!—and I did not know you!"

"I knew *you* at once. You are less changed than I; only graver—sterner ——"

"Older," he finished bitterly. "I was never one of fortune's favourites. Indeed, fate has been persistently unkind to me from

those old Blithedale days till now, when she has brought about this strange meeting," with a courteous little bow, which reminded her of the gallant Hubert Pomeroy of other days. "But tell me of yourself—your husband."

"He died three years ago. I have only my boy."

"There, at least, you are happy! He is a fine fellow."

"Ah! if you only knew what Hubert has been to me!"

"Hubert! My namesake, then?"

"Yes; I—I always liked the name." Her flush of colour went unperceived in the dim light.

"Did you? Yet it was a foolish mistake of mine to fancy, as I did once—that you liked its owner! Well! those days lie so far behind us now, that we can afford to laugh over them together. Did you think my message so very presumptuous? Tell me the truth; it cannot matter now."

"Oh! no! But I am not quite sure——" diving into the treasure-house of memory, where every trivial word and look of Hubert Pomeroy's in other days lay garnered up—"which message you mean?"

He smiled, yet with a touch of regret. "Ah! you have forgotten! Well! it is only natural! Among so many adorers, the homage of one more or less of course made little impression. I was thinking of a happy summer which we spent together fifteen years ago, and of the last day of my stay at Blithedale, when I found your aunt alone, and ventured to tell her of my hopes. You had a headache and were resting in your room, but she undertook to plead my cause with you. It was disinterested of her at least, for up to that time she had shown me small favour. I sent to you by her a crimson rose from my buttonhole. How I have hated the smell of roses ever since!—It was agreed between us that if you wore it that evening, I should take it as a sign that there was hope for me; if not—I promised not to pain you by pressing for any other answer."

"Well!" She was listening intently now, her hands clasped upon her knee, her eyes darkening with a cruel suspicion.

"The evening came. You appeared late, looking tired and ill, though you laughed even more gaily than usual with the circle round you. I drew near, hardly daring to look. Some flower as usual nestled at your throat, but—it was a spray of jessamine!"

"I never knew!" she cried in unspeakable agitation. "She told me nothing—nothing! What wicked treachery! While I waited, and wondered, and despised myself for having fancied——Ah! What has happened!"

Engrossed in their reminiscences, neither had noticed that the train had slackened speed unaccountably for some minutes past. Now the engine gave a stifled shriek—there was a hissing of steam, a sputtering—a grinding of wheels—calling—shouting, and they came to a standstill altogether.

Colonel Pomeroy, suddenly recalled to the present like one aroused from a perplexing dream, lowered the window and put his head out to inquire what was amiss. The rush of cold wind woke the sleepers in time to receive the news that in the blinding snow-storm they had run into a snow-drift. The engine and many of the foremost carriages were fast embedded; their own was buried a third of its height. The driver, it seemed, had tried to reverse his engine, but before he could do so the snow had put out the fires.

It was still falling fast: the white flakes powdered the Colonel's head and moustachios. "Not a hope of getting on to-night, I'm afraid," he said ruefully.

The old gentleman from his corner began railing against his ill-fortune, then rated his sleepy partner, declaring it was her fault for leaving home at all; which accusation she retorted upon him till the couple fell to arguing and mutual recrimination. From the neighbouring compartments came also the buzz of voices and despairing ejaculations as the truth became known, and heads on either side of them were thrust out-of-window clad in every variety of headgear. Pomeroy turned to Alison and met her anxious eyes.

"Is there any danger?" she asked faintly.

"Only of cold and hunger," he smiled reassuringly; "they will stop all trains behind us. But I'm afraid we are in for a weary waiting. And," consulting his watch, "another hour would have brought us to Burnside!"

"How provoking!"

"Do the Drummond-Orrs expect you by this train?"

"Yes; my cousin promised to send the carriage for me. How vexed she will be!"

"It's a pity she can't have the comfort of knowing you are not alone; but I left my coming uncertain, thinking I could not manage it before next week."

"How glad I am you changed your mind!"

He looked pleased. "So am I. And I've promised the other Hubert to take care of you, you know. By-the-bye I must shut the window, for we can't afford to lower our temperature. You look thoroughly chilled already."

In spite of her remonstrances he wrapped the whole of his thick railway rug closely round her, wishing he could transform her poor cloth jacket into Mrs. Drummond-Orr's luxurious sealskin.

"And pray, sir, what are we to do for food?" asked the north-countryman irately of Pomeroy, as though his fellow-traveller had been chief of a commissariat department. "We have only four sandwiches between us."

The Colonel smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "This lady and myself are even worse off. *We* have nothing but a packet of butter scotch!"

"It's no jesting matter, I tell you, sir. We'll be just starving before morning."

"And serve you right for saving a dinner in Edinbro'," his wife said tartly; "and all because you wanted to eat at Alec McDowell's expense instead of your own."

This gave the signal for another round of reproaches, which were bandied like a tennis-ball from one to the other. The "rally" was a prolonged one, and seemed to relieve the feelings of both.

Under cover of it, Pomeroy and Mrs. Lloyd resumed their talk. He told her of his life in India, exerting himself to divert her thoughts, and for a time succeeding. But one hour after another passed, and he could but see that his companion became with each paler and colder.

Their fellow-travellers, amid much wrangling, produced at last their frugal packet of sandwiches, and partook sparingly each of one, while Colonel Pomeroy and Alison looked on rather enviously.

But the old fellow of course had his grumble.

"Twopence a-piece—yet I wish now I had had more of them. Not but what the beef is very tough."

"Beef! it is *ham*," corrected his wife.

"*Beef*, I'll take my oath of it! They can't deceive me."

"Ham, Rob, I'm certain," persisted his better-half with decision, and the battle raged again; while their companions, who had neither beef nor ham to quarrel over, listened with mingled hunger and amusement.

Colonel Pomeroy, as he watched Alison's pale face, presently grew impatient with the situation. He put down the window and looked out, then bent over Alison.

"It has left off snowing; should you feel afraid if I were to leave you for a little while?" he asked anxiously. "I want to find out where we are, and if nothing can be done to make you more comfortable."

"Oh! pray go if you like. You must not let me be a burden. And I shall be quite safe. Though disagreeable, they are not dangerous," with a merry glance at the old couple.

Reassured by her cheerfulness, he turned up his coat-collar, pulled his deerstalker well over his ears, and plunged into the snow and darkness, the last audible sound as he closed the door behind him being: "It *was* ham, Rob," from the goodwife, in a tentative tone by way of reviving the dropped argument.

The snow outside lay knee-deep, but, tired of inaction, Pomeroy waded through it some fifty yards, retracing the way they had come till he reached a spot illumined by lanterns and torches, where men were busy shovelling away the snow. He was pleased to learn that the way was fairly passable from hence to the nearest station, an insignificant one a half-mile off, ignored by express trains, "though it's the nearest to Ladykirk for all that," was the answer he got to his inquiries. Here it might at least be possible to obtain food and

shelter of a kind for his less hardy companion, and with the hope he pressed on.

The time of his absence seemed a weary while to Alison, left with no entertainment but the old couple's wrangling and her own nervous fears. What if her kind escort should wander too far and be lost in the snow! such things were not uncommon. She had soon worked herself into a state of suppressed alarm, prepared for anything; and when at last the door was reopened and Pomeroy's tall figure appeared, she could not repress a cry of relief.

"At last! I had begun to imagine all sorts of dismal things!" she said, sinking back into her corner, while the faint colour returned to her cheeks.

"Except desertion, I hope. You knew I should keep my word to my namesake?"

"Oh, yes; I trusted you."

"Have faith in me still, then, for I want you to brave the cold and come with me. There is a little country station half a mile off, where at least we shall find a comfortable room, a fire and some food. The station-master's wife is an old acquaintance of mine, and has promised to do her best for you. It gets worse here with every hour, and I can't bear to see you look so white and cold."

"Of course I'll do as you think best," Alison said faintly, though her heart failed her at the prospect.

"Very well; then we will make the attempt." Pomeroy then explained their plan to their fellow-travellers, who for once in full accord declared that nothing should persuade them to leave their present shelter.

"Better to bear the ills we have, eh?" answered the Colonel, laughing. "Well! I think it is one of the occasions when a 'noble discontent' is praiseworthy. Come! Mrs. Lloyd, if you are well wrapped up."

He sprang out to assist Alison, but she hesitated a moment before taking the plunge into the pathless snow.

"I'm afraid your boots are not so thick as mine. You must let me help you over the worst of it."

And without waiting for permission, he lifted her gently in his arms and, so laden, trudged through the snow past the line of waiting carriages to the clearing at the farther end. There he set her down, congratulating herself that the darkness concealed her hot cheeks. Here it was just possible to get on, though the walking was still rough, and, struggling along with the help of Pomeroy's arm, Alison at last thankfully found herself on the platform of the little station. It was an old-fashioned building, but its shelter was oh! how welcome, for the snow was falling again now thick and fast.

Mrs. Lloyd brightened into cheerfulness again as Colonel Pomeroy threw open the door of a small but comfortable room, which boasted a blazing fire; whilst the station-master's wife came forward, the very

picture of an old woman in her well-fitting cap and gown. She had been still-room maid at the Drummond-Orrs' in the days of her youth, and prided herself upon never having lost her "gentility."

Mrs. Lloyd sat down upon the first seat she came to, which happened to be the window seat, trying very hard to look brave, whilst Pomeroy had paused a moment to pick up the cloak which had fallen from her on entering the room. Mrs. Blair hastily placed a small flagon of brandy upon the table, and proceeded in her motherly way to administer a restorative, which Alison, in spite of her assumed bravery, had never more needed in her life.

"There!" cried Pomeroy presently, drawing forward a chair to the fire and placing her in it; "this is a little improvement. And here comes Mrs. Blair with the tea she promised us. How good it looks! Porridge, too! I declare I haven't tasted porridge for fifteen years! Come, begin! You are exhausted for want of food."

He brought the tea and waited on Alison assiduously while she drank it and ate a little of the steaming porridge, well pleased to see her looking more like herself. She begged him to follow her example; but it was characteristic of Pomeroy—who always thought of others before himself—that he first tramped back all the way they had come, carrying a can of hot tea, a cup and a good portion of bread and butter to the cross-grained old couple who had shared their carriage.

"It will give them something fresh to argue over," he said, laughing.

When he returned a half-hour later, shaking himself free of the snow, he found his charge already refreshed by the timely food and warmth. The station-master's wife had taken her upstairs and made her comfortable with a loan of warm home-made stockings and a pair of huge slippers, putting her own to dry meantime. Alison began pouring out the tea she had kept hot for him. The Colonel begged Mrs. Blair to make a fresh brew, saying that hunger would soon drive others to follow their example.

"Or I might organise a relief party to dispense provisions," he suggested, as she hurried off to do his pleasure.

"But not till you have had a good meal yourself," Alison said, decidedly. "The porridge is lovely; do try it. I don't want a monopoly of all the good things."

He let himself be persuaded, establishing himself on a bench near her, with a bowl of hot porridge, which not even the pewter spoon could spoil. The surroundings were not favourable to romance, yet one of the pair at least could not help thinking how many eventful years had passed since last they broke bread together; how many hopes had died since those youthful days!

She sighed involuntarily at what "might have been" as she passed her companion his cup. He took it with one hand, and with the other detained hers, for his quick ears had caught the sigh.

"What! sighing over our Christmas feast! the first we have enjoyed together, too, for years! I'm afraid you are very tired?"

"Oh! no; I was only thinking of those old times. It is always sad to look back." She would have withdrawn her hand, but he only clasped it tighter.

"Is it? When the future perhaps has brighter things in store? Alison! a happy chance has brought about this meeting; shall we agree to take up our friendship from the point where it was interrupted so long ago? May I ask you over again that question you never really answered? I have loved you all this time—you and no other. Is there any hope for me now?"

He leaned across the table, eagerly questioning the sweet face only partially illumined by the fire flames, though the flare from the oil lamp behind her fell full on his, revealing all its earnestness. "Alison! give me only a crumb of hope and I will be content to begin my courting all over again."

She gave him a crumb certainly, for her hand remained contentedly in his; but as we know, *l'appétit vient en mangeant*, and having obtained so much, Pomeroy (like Oliver) asked for more, passing from a crumb to a slice, and from a slice to a whole loaf, till he had made Alison look up and confess that she had loved him years ago and was much in the same mind still.

At this he bent down to cover the hand he held with kisses, and might not even have stopped there but for Mrs. Blair's appearance with a kettle of boiling water and a fresh provision of tea.

Pomeroy in all his unselfish life had never found it more difficult to be philanthropic than now; nor did his looks welcome the stragglers who soon began to turn up one by one. But Alison set him a good example, and began hospitably dispensing the tea as though she had been in her own drawing-room. It pleased Pomeroy, however, to note her blushes whenever their fingers came in contact over the cups. Every shy, averted look, each tinge of heightened colour, seemed to assure him of his late-won victory.

I wonder if any of their fellow-travellers perceived the romance working itself out under their very eyes! As we pass on unheeding, engrossed each one with his own affairs, how many life-histories are unfolding around us! How often do we blunder into the middle of a third volume—or tread the brink of a crisis in someone else's story—or stand unknowing by while *Finis* is written to some long romance!

As the weary hours of that Christmas-eve passed into Christmas morning, Alison, amid all the discomforts of the situation, tired, cramped, crowded, cold and stifled by turns, was conscious always of the invisible shield of love and tenderness outspread between her and the annoyances of the outer world. Life was no longer the dreary thing it had so lately looked to her, for she seemed to stand upon the threshold of a future which should compensate the painful

MRS. BLAIR HASTILY PLACED A FLACON OF BRANDY UPON THE TABLE AND PROCEEDED TO ADMINISTER A RESTORATIVE.

past, and her heart glowed within her as the dull, mean room became transformed into an ante-chamber of unknown felicities.

Mid-day had come and gone, when a rough sledge, drawn by a steady old cob, was seen approaching the little station-house, and hailed by the imprisoned travellers with as much rapture as the sail descried by a castaway from his desert island. It proved to be a vehicle despatched from Ladykirk in search of some missing provision hampers, and its driver had special orders to inquire for tidings of the delayed train. Pomeroy, who had just returned from one of his relief expeditions, saw his opportunity, and rushed out to parley with the driver. In a minute or two he came back, triumphant. The sleigh was a rude one, intended for luggage, but it would be possible to make Mrs. Lloyd fairly comfortable upon it; and, as it was now temporarily fine overhead, the Colonel arranged that the hampers and themselves should travel in company to their destination.

Oh! and it was a warm welcome that the chilled and weary wayfarers received upon the threshold of Ladykirk from its hospitable master and mistress. And it was Mrs. Drummond-Orr herself who led Alison upstairs to the luxurious guest-chamber, to be refreshed and warmed and petted, while her husband hurried off to make provision for the less fortunate travellers left behind.

A half-hour later, Colonel Pomeroy joined his friend in the library, looking at least ten years younger for his late experiences. His host looked up with ready sympathy.

"Really, Pomeroy, who would have thought of your having to spend the best part of your Christmas shut up in that pokey little hole! It's an awful sell for you!"

"Not at all, Jack. Indeed—to tell the truth, old fellow—I never enjoyed one more!"

Jack stared at his cousin. Was downright Hubert Pomeroy taking to sarcasm!

"Well! tastes differ, of course," the master of the house said, curtly.

Colonel Pomeroy had been pacing the room with his hands in his pockets—or rather in Jack's pockets, for of course no luggage was yet forthcoming, and his grey lounging suit was a loan from his host. —Now he suddenly turned and faced his cousin.

"The fact is, Jack, perhaps I ought to explain that it's all up with Emmie's matrimonial plans. I'm an engaged man—at last!"

"You don't say so! Well! Better late than never. I congratulate you with all my heart. Perhaps she will be a little disappointed, poor little woman! But that can't be helped. Emmie!" as his wife appeared at this moment, "come and tell Pomeroy how pleased we are that he is going to follow our example at last."

"That I will, dear!" holding out both hands to Hubert with the

sunniest smile of triumph. "For I'm sure it can be no one but Ailie. I noticed something was up directly you two came in together. Tell me, am I right?"

"Yes—you always are," Colonel Pomeroy confessed gaily. "Forgive me if I've disappointed you, but I have been completing a courtship begun fifteen years ago."

"And you couldn't have pleased me better. No one could ever resist Alison, and directly I found she would be with us for Christmas, I made up my mind you should fall in love with each other all over again."

Then the kind hostess hastened back to her other guest, whom she found toasting herself before a cosy fire, looking very sweet, and shy, and pretty in a crimson tea-gown of soft silk, which her own wardrobe had furnished.

Mrs. Drummond-Orr shut the door deliberately and joined her cousin at the fireside.

"*Well*, Ailie?" she began significantly.

"Well, Emmie, dear——" Then as Mrs. Drummond-Orr still looked expectant: "Your tea-gown is most comfortable, and . . . ."

"And very becoming, I see, but"—impatiently—"I did not come up here to talk about tea-gowns. Ailie!"—holding out her hands wistfully—"Have you nothing to tell me? You may as well make your confession, as Hubert has done already."

Alison turned suddenly and threw herself into her cousin's outstretched arms.

"Then—then—you know that what you once wished has come to pass at last! And oh! Emmie! he actually loved me all the time—only Aunt Clara broke faith with him and never told me."

"Perfidious creature! So you have her to thank for your long heartache!"

"And *you*, dear Emmie"—with a warm caress—"for bringing us together again. Oh! shall I ever forget my Christmas in a snowdrift?"

LADY DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

I.

WEST MALLION is a sleepy, easy-going little red-brick town, that lies sunning itself on the southern slope of a hill. A cycling tourist now and then wheels himself into view, gingerly skirting the cobble-stones; the three young ladies from the rectory, with their baskets and red memorandum-books, trudge past in a violent hurry, on parish work intent; and occasionally the great barouche and pair from Mallionhay rumbles in majestically, with handsome Lady Diana Mallion and her pretty daughter, Miss Muriel Dasent, come to do as much shopping as the enterprise of the West Mallion tradesmen will allow them.

The Mallions always deal in the place, "like real gentlefolk as they are," the landlord of the Mallion Arms is wont to observe approvingly on these occasions.

And then he goes on to recall the good old times as he remembers them before Sir Henry's accident, when open house was kept at Mallionhay, and there was coming and going, and the carriages and horses of guests overflowed the Mallionhay stables into those of the Mallion Arms, and money changed hands merrily. In those good old times before the dark, dark day when Sir Henry killed King Cole, the best horse in his stable, in Farmer Tippinge's gravel-pit alongside Withal Spinney—not to speak of damaging his own head to that extent that all the London doctors couldn't rightly say whether they could ever get the sense back into it again.

Then, perhaps by way of illustration to the story, a glimpse might be had of poor Sir Henry himself, lying back in a corner of the carriage amongst his cushions, a silk cap pulled low over his brow to conceal the cruel scars left by the horse's trampling hoofs; the dim ghost of his old jovial smile crossing his face now and then when his wife called his attention to some friendly greeting, or he vaguely recognised some familiar object.

It was a piteous sight. Lady Diana did not care to let him be seen too often.

She would more frequently ride into the town alone, or accompanied by her young daughter, a slight, graceful slip of a lass with a sweet, wilful, spoilt-child face, and great dusky, inscrutable eyes. "Nothing to her mother," mine host would opine, his reminiscences forthwith meandering back to the best of all old times when Sir Henry married his beautiful wife, an earl's daughter and the widow of John Dasent, the richest man in London—though he, the narrator, was given to understand that her money did nobody any particular

good, being all tied up tight by the lawyers for Miss Muriel, who wouldn't get it till she came of age the year after next.

The Mallion Arms stands in the market-place, of course; and at its lowest and most retired corner is the dark, small-paned window of "Mark Serafton, Watchmaker and Jeweller." Within, Mr. Mark Serafton himself is generally to be found—a sedate, pale and gentlemanly young man, concerning whom West Mallion is divided in its mind. He has been amongst them for more than a dozen years and they have not succeeded yet in analysing and formulating him.

There is nothing against him that anyone knows. He came with the highest recommendations to "old Belshaw" as his assistant, married "old Belshaw's" daughter, succeeded in the natural course of things to "old Belshaw's" business, and having buried both his young wife and her old father, lived on peaceably and prosperously in the sight of all men.

Yet there is a vague, floating idea that Mr. Serafton and West Mallion have after all little in common. He has, it is rumoured, "London connections," wealthy folk of his own, from whom he parted in a boyish whim.

It is certain that he has money at command; and many a prosperous-looking agriculturist, driving past on a Tuesday with his smart trap and horse, thinks uncomfortably of sundry documents reposing in the safe custody of Mr. Serafton's strong-box. It is also certain that the ordinary traffic of the shop would not keep him in board and lodging for a day, let alone his stalwart nephew, Robert Belshaw, with whom, on the evening when this story begins in earnest, he was taking a substantial tea in the parlour behind the shop.

The master was engaged with a scientific review, the apprentice with broiled ham and eggs. The shop door-bell gave a faint tinkle. Robert hurried off to attend it, disgustedly, with his mouth full, and Mr. Serafton laid down his book and emptied his cup.

"Two ladies wish to see you, sir," announced Robert, returning; and Mr. Serafton, hastening into the dusky shop, bowed to two dusky figures blocking out the light from the doorway.

"We've come on private business," said the foremost. "Can't you take us somewhere where we can be quiet?"

"Certainly, madam. Robert! You may shut up, and then finish your tea. Please step this way." And he ushered the two into a dark little private office looking on the side street.

He was not unaccustomed to visits of a confidential nature, and had, by practice, grown expert in taking his clients' measure in the first few rapid glances. In those three short steps from shop to office he noticed the dress, air and gait of the two women; and before he had drawn down the window-blind and turned up the gas, had made a string of accurate little observations that proved useful later on.

"A lady!" was his comment on the one who had not spoken.

"Holds her head high; veil unnecessarily thick; made the other fall back to let her pass first; steps well. The other?—her maid? No. Shoulders square; chest flat; stride too long for her skirts. Not a woman at all!"

He politely handed forward two chairs, and then placed himself on the far side of his writing-table.

"You are in the habit of advancing money, Mr. Serafton?" the "lady" began in a low tone.

He bowed. "I may have done such a thing in a small way," with a gentle, deprecating shrug; "not in the regular course of my business."

"We want a large sum—and at once!" broke in the taller figure, impatiently, pushing before the other.

"A large sum! Twenty—thirty—did you want as much as fifty?" asked the jeweller, speaking deliberately with intention, while he fixed his keen eyes as if considering on the speaker's face. "It would, of course, depend on circumstances. For instance, on the security you had to offer——"

Then he mentally ran on: "Dark; small-featured for his size; round red lips; left eye-tooth broken off short; something marked about the eyebrows; seen eyebrows like them before—*where* was it? gipsy hat pulled down well over them."

"Fifty!" was the reply, with a scoff. "You do business on a larger scale than that, as we happen to know, sir. Fifty! Fifty hundred would be nearer the mark. Of course we've got security: good solid stuff, worth double the amount."

He was carrying a black leather bag, a fact which Mr. Serafton had also duly noted and weighed. "Not his wife, that, else she'd have been the one to carry the load."

"Look here!" and he brought it down on the table with an ostentatious bang. Mr. Serafton watched him in silence. The bag contained a number of leather cases and some small articles tied up in a silk handkerchief. His client opened the first case, and pushed it across to him defiantly.

The jeweller gazed in speechless wonder. Jewels were the one ardent, absorbing, all-devouring passion of the grave young man's life. He gazed on the rubies with wondering, awe-struck admiration; touched them with tender, dexterous fingers; held them to the light; breathed on them; rubbed them, and laid them in their case, still gazing in a sort of devotional ecstasy.

"Now, look at these."

Next came a cross of emeralds, flawless beyond all his experience, and of a rich, intoxicating depth of colour. Then a set of huge cameos, costly in their day, in a rich, ugly, expensive setting. Then came out of a shabby, old-fashioned case a girlish string of pearls, with a coronet and initials in pearls on the clasp. Followed by a miscellaneous collection of valuables.

Mr. Serafton turned them over, weighed, handled and valued. "How much did you want?" he asked dubiously.

"Five thousand."

"Quite impossible," he replied decidedly. "That is their utmost value."

Then he proceeded to explain, as the two looked at one another disconcerted.

"I cannot in any case advance you the money from my own resources. I know where it is to be got, and am prepared to do the best I can to obtain it for you on reasonable terms. But I am bound to protect myself from any possible risk. I should not take these trinkets, for example, under any circumstances without a clear understanding of how you came to offer them to me. I know these too well to be mistaken in them"—and he fingered the emeralds lovingly—"though I have only met them once before. They, and all the rest are, I believe, the property of Sir Henry Mallion."

The previous speaker, with a low imprecation, brought his fist down violently on the table, but was silenced by his companion, who, stepping forward with much dignity, lifted her veil, saying: "I can satisfy you on that point, I think. I am Lady Diana Mallion."

Mr. Serafton bowed profoundly.

"Let me understand exactly what you can do for me. I have immediate need of a large sum of money at once and unknown to my husband. You are aware of his condition. I have entire authority to act for him. When he comes to himself I am convinced he will bear me out in the course which I am pursuing. For the present I desire to keep the matter secret."

"Anything I can do to oblige your ladyship —— "

"I want, as you have heard, £5,000."

"I might manage with the aid of friends to raise as much on your ladyship's personal security."

"That might involve interviews—lawyers—I might die," she said agitatedly. "It would never do. Let me hear what you can do for me with these. They are all my own. Nothing of Sir Henry's—of my daughter's even—amongst them. What are they worth?"

"I could negotiate the sale of these for you," he replied, putting aside the rubies and the emerald cross, "but it is a risk. Selling in haste means certain loss."

She shook her head. "You hear," she whispered to the other. "Do you expect me to do more for you? Take the things yourself and make what you can of them."

"And raise a hue and cry at my heels directly? Thank you, no, my lady! I made my conditions pretty distinct, I fancy, and I mean to stick to them," he growled sullenly: Mr. Serafton catching the sense of the words by instinct from the fragments of syllables that reached him. He waited curiously.

"Then there is one more alternative," spoke Lady Diana at last. "You know the Mallion diamonds?"

The jeweller's eyes sparkled. "Know them well, my lady!"

"If you had those, could you raise me the money I want on them? They are worth more than ten times the sum."

"They are; but—excuse me—they are celebrated stones, heirlooms, I have been given to understand. It would be difficult to pledge them secretly."

"There is no need for secrecy. All the world may know that you have them in keeping—to be cleaned—reset—whatever pretext you like to choose. They *are* heirlooms, but Sir Henry has no heir—not the most distant cousin living on the Mallion side. In default they were settled on me at the time of our marriage. I may be able to redeem them before very long—" she caught her companion's eyes fixed greedily on her—"through the generosity of a friend to whom I may make my need known," she went on pointedly.

With Mr. Serafton's help, she replaced the valuables in their cases, and laid them aside. Then she divested herself of the long cloak she wore. Underneath was a short dark jacket, which she unfastened and slipped off, and then unpinned her small hat and long veil. Her dark close gown, her high-coiled black masses of hair, were all a-sparkle with fairy light. Bands of diamonds girdled her waist, her neck, her arms; diamonds blazed in one great starry cluster on her breast, shone from a coronet of lesser stars in her hair. From a small chamois bag she rained out eardrops, pins for the hair, clasps, lockets, stray stars to form pendants or brooches at will.

The jeweller drew back dazzled at the glittering treasures flashing and scintillating in the light of his one poor gas-jet, but the other bent forward with a deep ejaculation and a face of sudden savage greed.

Lady Diana stripped herself of her glistening burden, giving each article, one by one, to the jeweller, who examined it reverently, in a sort of dumb ecstasy. The Mallion diamonds! He could hardly find breath to answer her next words.

"Then I suppose you can manage the business for me? Come over to Mallionhay to-morrow, and tell me what I am to do. I am going to leave them here to-night."

Both her hearers started, and Mr. Serafton felt his knees give way with him.

"Why not? They will be safe here. You can give me a receipt, of course. And you," to her companion, "stand over there by the door whilst the list is being made out."

Mr. Serafton made out his inventory with trembling fingers, and a heart beating wildly with rapture. He laid each piece of jewellery on a velvet-lined tray as he catalogued it, Lady Diana paying less heed to his proceedings than if it had been a discarded heap of child's playthings. She stood erect and watchful between the diamonds and the form by the door.

At the clang of the door of the iron safe she turned. "Is that secure?"

"Perfectly. Burglar-and-fire-proof, my lady."

"Good! You will keep a watchman in the shop."

"My nephew Robert shall sleep there."

"And a dog who knows his business?"

"I think the last man who found his way into the back-yard in an irregular manner was quite satisfied of the fact."

"Then you'll want everyone of them this week. Double every precaution that you have ever imagined, and you will still be insecure. Good-night."

Then, bowing graciously to the amazed young tradesman, she crushed the receipt unread into her pocket and swept out after her companion with undiminished dignity.

Down the empty little by-lane the two passed like black shadows, the man slouching along ahead, Lady Diana following leisurely. They passed out of the town into the open country, taking short cuts and field-paths till they reached the main road at a cross way, where one arm of the finger-post bore "To Mallionhay," and the other "To London."

"There's your road," said Lady Diana.

"Ah, but suppose I won't take it?" broke out the man fiercely. "Suppose I won't be shipped off to Australia for the next year or so? I've been doing some thinking on the way, and I've about decided to stay at home, and spoil your game for you; as I should like to spoil your sneering face this minute." And he turned savagely on her, his own face white and evil in the moonlight.

The disdain on her face deepened a trifle as she answered him composedly.

"No, you will not do that, though I am here alone, and not a man within hail. You will not do that, for I am the one person in the world to whom you can turn for help."

"Fine help! Call it by its right name. Say you are buying me off and doing it cheaply."

"You will have three thousand pounds paid down. That will be more than enough to silence all those whom you have reason to fear. Your passage and outfit will be paid for. You will land in Australia as a gentleman, and one hundred pounds will be placed in your hands on landing. After that you will receive ten pounds weekly as long as you abstain from annoying us. Do you at present see your way to getting better terms for yourself from anyone else?"

"How am I to trust you?"

"Because it is to my interest to keep faith with you. I know I am only keeping off the evil day for a time, and that some day the money may give out, and my hold over you will cease. But it is for my husband's sake that I stoop so low as to trade with you thus."

He laughed jeeringly. "For Sir Henry's sake solely, of course! We understand each other, madam."

Then he drew nearer, his eyes gleaming with an eager light from out his disguise. He spoke in his natural voice now. It was deep and musical, a pleasing voice to listen to, and its tones were full of soft persuasiveness.

"Why should we be enemies?" he asked gently. "You are dealing generously by me; don't you suppose I might be minded to do the same by you when my turn comes uppermost? Remember, you have only seen the worst of me. Now you have given me a chance, and I'll show you I can make the most of it. What's to prevent me being as good a gentleman as another after a year or two in society?"

"I hope you will—for all our sakes," she said gravely, knowing at the same time how utterly hopeless it was to expect anything like reformation from him.

"A gentleman," he repeated eagerly. "Not a bad one to look at either. Why shouldn't good blood show itself in me as well as another? Say that I come home in a couple of years with a new name and good introductions. Suppose I am content to let my claims on you drop for ever, and ask you to do nothing but keep the secret and give me your friendship——"

"Friendship with you!"

"You'll find it better than my enmity, my lady. If I'm content to leave you undisturbed at Mallionhay and take pretty Muriel and old Dasent's money as payment in full of all inconvenient demands——"

Then the scornful composure of her face vanished in flaming wrath.

"Villain!" she cried. "Dare to take my little daughter's name between your lips again, and I go straight to my husband and take the risk of all!—Now go your way."

He scowled at her in silence; then obeying her fiery gesture turned and slunk away down the white, moonlit road out of her sight.

He stopped in the shadow of a tall bit of hedge-row. The road behind him was empty, but he raised one hand and shook it savagely at the sky over Mallionhay. "You shall pay me back, my lady! Pay me in full for every word you have uttered this night. Pay me with your diamonds—your girl—Mallionhay! Ah, and when I have stripped you of all, the score will be still unsettled."

The footfall of some chance wayfarer sounded afar through the night's stillness, and he trudged sullenly on towards his destination.

II.

A YEAR or two, more or less, mattered little to West Mallion. A stranger returning after such an interval might see little change in the sleepy market-place, in the young ladies from the rectory, or the

political out-look according to the county paper. Only the dwellers themselves were conscious of a subtle stir and brightening of the atmosphere, of an exhilarating suggestion in the air that the bad times lay behind now and the good times were coming, if not actually come. Prices ranged no higher on a market-day than they did before, but Mallionhay was open again and entertaining the whole country-side right royally.

Mine host of the Mallion Arms had advanced with the times, and entertained the loungers in the bar with an entirely new series of reminiscences, beginning with the description, given with much gusto, of how the great foreign doctors had, so to speak, cut Sir Henry's head right open and set the inside to rights as good as ever; and concluding with a detailed account of the grand doings at the christening of the splendid young heir that Lady Diana had brought home with her. The family were putting up a big stained window in the church as a thank-offering, whether for Sir Henry's head or the baby he couldn't rightly say.

It might be for Miss Muriel's coming of age, after all. That young lady *had* something to be thankful for to be sure. Nigh upon a million, he was given to understand, all for her own spending. It's a serious thing to think of. Ah, there she was, a-coming from the church sure enough, and her mother, too, and a finer pair you'll see nowhere—though for choice give him Lady Diana. "Good-day, my lady; good-day, miss."

Lady Diana walked her horse a few steps farther, then turned and beckoned to him. She was looking well and handsome, full of light and brightness. Muriel drooped a little in her saddle, and looked around with wistful, perplexed eyes, as if Care had somehow set her mark on the young beauty and heiress whose coming birthnight ball was the talk and expectation of three counties.

"What has become of Mr. Serafton?" asked Lady Diana. "I see the shutters closed. Has he left the town for good?"

Now, of all people in West Mallion, Lady Diana was best able to give news of the absent jeweller, but she had her own reasons for asking.

"Mr. Serafton, my lady, left the town—let me see—more than a year ago; nearly two it must be. His father sent for him, I am given to understand. A great diamond merchant, I think—I don't quite remember the name of the firm; perhaps your ladyship might have known it. They do say that he has made his son a partner; but we've all lost sight of him here."

They rode silently homewards, side by side, in the green summer twilight of the leafy lanes.

"Shall you go to London to-morrow?" Muriel inquired at last.

"To London? No, child. The diamonds are at Southbeach. They are in Mr. Serafton's charge, and he is at the Southbeach place of business. Yes, I must go there to-morrow and make some arrange-

ment about the diamonds for that night at least. You heard what your father said to-day. I did not think he could have been so agitated about anything."

"Poor mother," and Muriel leant from her saddle to stroke her hand. "He did not mean to be angry with you. You know the doctors said he might have queer fancies and irritate himself about trifles. He has approved of everything else you have done during his illness."

"I must set his mind at rest about those wretched diamonds at all risks."

"Of course you can," interrupted Muriel cheerily. "Why, by the evening you want them I shall have been able to draw you a cheque for Mr. Serafton's whole claim. I mean to do what I choose with my money, unquestioned and independently, I can tell you, mother dear."

"Oh, darling," sighed Lady Diana, "if you knew the relief it has been to tell you my troubles. If Sir Henry had but recovered as completely as we hoped he would, there would have been no further need for these odious deceptions."

"Perhaps there never *was* the need," Muriel said in a low voice. "Perhaps if you had trusted me with the whole of your secret—the purpose for which you wanted the money."

"Muriel! my child, what do you mean?"

The groom here rode forward to open the park gate, and they were perforce silent. Under the portico of the house they could see Sir Henry waiting to receive them with jovial, loud-voiced greeting. In the hall a footman delivered a request from the nurse that "my lady would come into the nursery before the young gentleman was settled to sleep." It seemed hours before she could seek the privacy of her own dressing-room, where she found Muriel standing by the window in deep thought, still in her habit, nervously twisting the lash of her riding-whip.

"Mother!" she cried, as Lady Diana entered, "Oh, mother! If you had but told me!" There was reproach mingled with sorrow in her voice.

"Told you? *What* have you heard, child?"

"Everything! It has weighed like a stone here," and she pressed her hands on her heart impetuously. "To think of *your* stooping to deceit and bribery. Oh, mother——"

"But, darling, what was I to do? Think of Sir Henry," cried the mother wildly. "How was I to deal with the man?"

"Trust him! Trust his noble nature, his sense of family feeling, his honour, his affection for the father who renounced him. Yes, he took your money. You left him no other resource. He took but what was rightly his own, what we had been keeping him from all these years. He bore with your disdain in silence; his hands were tied. But when the time comes that he may safely come

forward and claim his own, *then* you shall see how little your bribe was needed to buy his forbearance towards his father!"

Lady Diana stood like a stone statue, her dilated eyes fixed on the excited girl, her lips growing whiter and whiter with terror.

"Child! Muriel! Am I mad? Who is this that you are speaking of to me? Where have you met him? How has he dared to approach you?"

"At Florence," the girl said more steadily. "While you were absorbed in nursing Sir Henry after the operation. He only came to me for news. He could not bear the suspense longer. What else could he have done? You had forbidden him to address you or his father. I used to meet him every evening; that is"—for Lady Diana started and shuddered—"I used just to speak a few words from the balcony and he would go away satisfied. He never wrote to me till baby was born. I could not meet him then. I was too much with you. I—I could not blame his wanting to let me know how he felt towards this brother who was to supplant him——"

"Hush, hush!" Lady Diana screamed. "I cannot bear this. Oh, Muriel, Muriel! Promise me to wait before you judge me. Promise you will write to him no more, nor see him, nor let him come near you till Sir Henry knows all. It is a little thing to ask you. Promise, if you love me!"

"I will obey if you order me," answered Muriel in the coldest tone her mother had ever heard pass her lips. "If you insist that he shall be left a while longer outcast and disowned, I cannot prevent it. But I cannot promise to think you are doing right, mother. I am on his side from henceforth remember, mother."

"God help me!" sighed Lady Diana.

Mark Serafton's establishment on the Southbeach Esplanade is a solid, respectable pile, like a bank or public office. There is no vulgar expanse of plate-glass with a catchpenny show of glittering gew-gaws behind it. Within was precious store of gems and gold as all the world might see, but only to a favoured few, connoisseurs of name, personal friends of Mr. Serafton's own, or visitors bearing a written order from Lady Diana Mallion, would the innermost shrine be opened, and the glory of the whole be revealed.

A certain unimportant-looking door at the far end of the shop would be opened by a key that never left Mr. Serafton's possession except for a few rare intervals, when it was trusted to the care of his devoted nephew, Robert. The door opened on a second, and that on a small, windowless chamber, a separate building, burglar and fire-proof, in the centre of which, under a case of strong plate-glass, lay dazzling in the rays of the electric light a priceless mass of treasure, the crown and centre of which were the Mallion diamonds.

It was understood that they had been entrusted to him to be reset,

and some missing stones replaced, and that the search for the match had occupied the trade for months.

There Lady Diana found them. Mr. Serafton conducted her with a slow step and a sad to the strong room, explaining the precautions he had taken for their defence in a voice filled with the pain of parting. They had wound themselves very closely round his heart.

"I will bring them to you myself on the morning of the twenty-third," he said with the calm of a supreme resignation.

"I suppose you could not let me have them any sooner?" she asked. "Sir Henry is possessed by such extraordinary fancies about them. It is a lingering trace of his illness, and we must do our best to quiet his mind. He is angry and suspicious about my trusting them to you."

Mr. Serafton had hardly spirit left to feel indignant at the suggestion. He explained in a dull, indifferent manner that at present the security of the diamonds was absolute. The room had been designed by a celebrated engineer. Only a party of skilled masons with time and appliances could break through from outside or below. The lock of the iron door was a special patent opened by only one key in the world, and that key never out of Mr. Serafton's or Robert's possession. Then the case and stand on which it stood were practically impregnable.

To cut through the plate-glass or to tamper with the stand would be to set an alarm to work at Mr. Serafton's private residence and another at the nearest police station. He went on to tell of the well-armed watchman, but Lady Diana interrupted him wearily.

"Thank you; I know I am foolish, but I feel as if nothing that you can say will reassure me. I dread the two days to come unspeakably. I am treading blindfold amongst pitfalls. Perhaps the loss of my diamonds may not prove the deepest."

She checked herself abruptly with a nervous glance at Muriel. But Muriel turned unresponsively away and walked back through the shop, where Robert, who had by this time formed himself into a very elegant copy of his uncle, watched her admiringly from behind the counter.

Mr. Serafton shook his head ominously as he returned from accompanying Lady Diana to the cab that took the two ladies back to the station. "Not the woman she was," he sighed to Robert in a confidential moment later on when the shop was cleared. "Did you notice a gentleman on the opposite side of the road who took off his hat as the cab drove off? Do you happen to know who it was?"

"A Captain Trevor, staying at the Imperial," Robert responded, colouring slightly. "Yes, I know him a little and he knows them. He spoke to Miss Dasent; he is a relation, I fancy; I know he signs himself 'Mallion Trevor.'"

"You know a good deal about him, Bob. Yes, he *did* remind me of Sir Henry. The same queer-shaped eyebrows." Mr. Serafton

gave what would have been a jump in one less dignified, and rubbed his head suddenly. He had met with a pair of similar eyebrows once before, he recollected. "I'm going out, Robert. I shall be in to dinner at eight. If not, don't wait for me."

Robert was accustomed to his uncle's ways, and was not much surprised when he began, pouring out his first glass of after-dinner claret, as if the conversation had never been interrupted.

"So Captain Mallion Trevor, late Scinde Light Horse, was here last spring for some time—help yourself, Bob—while I was in Amsterdam. Made a pot of money on the Southbeach Spring Meeting, and stayed on here, spending it like a gentleman. Perhaps you can oblige me with some further details, Robert."

Bob's conscience was clear, but he flushed up to the eyes with embarrassment. He was still boy enough to blush, despite his high collar and waxed moustache.

"Yes, I met him then; but he's no friend of mine, as you seem to think. I used to go to the billiard-room of the Imperial in those days—it was before you objected, you know—and we played a good deal at one time. He *would* go on playing, though I was too strong for him. He came in and out to see me at my rooms once or twice——"

"And asked to see the diamonds?" suggested Mr. Serafton.

"The diamonds? No, I don't remember that he ever did. We may have talked about them—that was natural——" and here Bob broke off awkwardly enough; but his uncle was waiting for him to continue, and he dared not stop half-way.

"We talked about them in connection with the Mallions, you know. You see how it was"—Bob went on more fluently—"when he turned up again last month, and suggested a game, I was obliged to say I wasn't going to play any more. I'd given it up. Then he asked me into his room, just for a quiet cigar, and—I think we both took more than was good for us; for he went on by the hour raving about his beautiful cousin, Muriel—Miss Dasent, that is—and showed me her photograph and her letters in his pocket-book, and said Lady Diana was on his side, but Sir Henry objected to their engagement, and a lot more. I was awfully interested, but rather confused myself, and don't recollect much about the rest of the conversation; so, when he asked me next morning to say no more about it, and forget what he had told me as soon as I could—why, so I did."

"And was that the very last of him?" Mr. Serafton's face was still anxious. "Has he never been about this place since?"

"Once," Bob admitted. "He came in awfully agitated, and said the Mallions were just behind him, and begged me to let him wait somewhere where he could see them without being seen, and so I took him into your private office—only for a few minutes," pleaded Bob, in deprecation of the sudden wrath in his uncle's face; "not

five at most; just till the ladies came in, and we saw it was not the Mallions. Then he went off at once, and never came near the place again till to-day."

"You saw Miss Dasent speak to him?"

"No, I didn't; he spoke to her—something about a promise and two days more. She is coming of age directly, I know."

"Two days more—just what Lady Diana said. I wish they were over, with all my heart, Robert," sighed Mr. Serafton heavily.

Robert looked sympathetic. "Don't worry about Mallion Trevor, uncle. He went up to town by the next train. I saw him go. You're getting low, uncle. You'll be twice the man, once you are rid of those diamonds."

The gloom of Lady Diana's forebodings had proved infectious. Mr. Serafton spent a restless evening, followed by a broken, feverish night. Before going to bed he tried to compose himself by a visit to the shop to convince himself anew of its absolute security.

He found all as it ought to be: big Solomon Daly, the watchman, fresh as a daisy and sober as a judge, at his post, revolver in belt, truncheon in hand, and alarum in working order.

Returning up the street the first big drops of a thunder-shower spotted the pavement in front of him, and a low, distant rumble came up on the rising wind. He was scarcely within shelter before the storm burst over Southbeach with a crash that shook the town.

It was a night of wreck and disaster long to be remembered there. Solomon Daly, an ex-fisherman, accustomed to all sorts of weather, felt that he would rather have met it in the open, and paced his limited beat uneasily. He couldn't bring himself to-night to settle down to a read of the daily paper, which Robert, like a good-natured young fellow as he was, used to leave in a certain corner for his benefit. He would pocket the paper for home perusal.

Ah, what was that? Something he hadn't noticed when first he came in. "Now that is like Mr. Robert, that is!" Pipes were a strictly forbidden luxury, but a cigar—a Havanah, like the one he was now rolling between his hands and smelling approvingly—a mighty mellow-tinted weed, just such a one as he had seen in the lips of Mr. Robert or his swell friends scores of times—and on a night like this.

He lighted up without more ado, and gave himself over to the enjoyment of the moment, never troubling himself to inquire if it was or was not a breach of discipline. It was a fine, full-flavoured weed, rather strong he thought at first, as he waved the smoke away from his eyes with a somewhat tremulous hand—seemed to get into his head as his own pipe never did. He took it from his lips and contemplated it stupidly for a minute consideringly, then replaced it and drew feebly at it again. He fancied he heard a noise behind him and tried to rise, but dropped back again heavily. He was getting

confused with the noise of the thunder, which just then broke into a loud crash, directly over the roof it seemed.

There had been another noise drowned in the tumult above, a familiar, homely sound—the creak of a door, and that door Mr. Serafton's private office. It swung lightly ajar, and through the aperture a pair of keen, dark eyes watched Mr. Solomon Daly's further proceedings with affectionate concern.

The eyes belonged to a slim, dark young fellow, whom Robert might have recognised as Captain Mallion Trevor, and a very striking appearance Captain Trevor presented. Clad in dark trousers and dark silk shirt, his waistcoat replaced by a broad belt, and his feet shod with noiseless felt, he seemed to take up less room than a shadow, and move as noiselessly as a cat as he slid a few paces from his cover to get a better view of the watchman's face.

Solomon's head was beginning to nod unsteadily forward and his eyes to blink, and Captain Trevor smiled approval. The narcotic was working, and there would be no occasion to employ a certain slight, broad-bladed, ugly-looking weapon which he held in his hand. He retreated again to Mr. Serafton's arm-chair. He was in no hurry. He had deliberately devoted three quarters of a year to waiting for the chance five minutes which had left Robert and the keys at his mercy, and three months more for the right moment for using them.

Aha! the cigar had slipped from between Solomon's lips and caught on the front of his coat. He made no effort to remove it, but sat smiling idiotically at it from time to time. Captain Trevor resumed his seat. The night was still young and he was well within the time he had allowed himself before beginning his work.

He had not long to wait before Solomon had slidden sideways down in his chair and was slumbering heavily, with a smile of perfect beatitude hovering on his lips. Captain Trevor then gently rose from his seat, and turned to the attack on Mr. Serafton's stronghold.

He held his breath with intensest anxiety for one moment while he fitted the tiny key in the lock; it turned, the door gave and the strong white light within seemed to flash forth and smite him like a sword.

He was alone with the diamonds. Under the strong radiance the gems shone bravely, and his greedy eyes gloated on them as he prowled round the case seeking a point of entrance.

He must attack the strong plate-glass, in itself a formidable obstacle, but he was provided with glazier's tools of the best. He had been preparing himself for the work for long and set about it with a practised hand.

The glass yielded at last, a gentle pressure and the fragment fell with a soft crash inwards on to the velvet cushion. He had cut it out low down, close to the band of ornamental ironwork at the base. A small opening, but enough to afford a passage to his bare arm.

His heart stood still with excitement for one moment, the next he had stripped up his sleeve to the shoulder. "Now, my Lady Diana, I have you! Your daughter, Mallionhay, and the diamonds!"

III.

MURIEL DASENT lay sleeping in the early sunshine of her birthday morning. Beside the bed knelt Lady Diana studying the fair, childish face with eyes of such piteous appeal, that though she spoke no word the sleeper seemed to feel their troubling influence, and turning restlessly round sighed softly and raised the white lids of her drowsy blue eyes. Her mother's heart throbbed at the first sweet look of love and trust that dawned in them, and then sank cold and heavy as the smile grew fixed and conventional and a shroud of reserve drew over the frank young face.

"Many happy returns of the day, darling." She tried to speak brightly but her voice was unsteady, and she met Muriel's kiss with a sob.

"Muriel! I have come to plead with you. I can no longer appeal to your love or your faith in me. You have been silently judging me in your own mind, and have called me unrighteous ——"

"No, mother," the girl protested. "You have never done anything but what you thought best and most expedient, but ——"

"But, I have stood between father and son, and usurped the heir's place for my own child? That is what you would say? I have held my hand under pretext of sparing my husband? That is his story, is it not? What does he call himself?"

"Trevor," answered Muriel in a low voice. "His mother's name."

"Untrue like all the rest. Now hear my side. Let me tell you who and what he is. My husband's son, truly, and by his first wife, and she, a creature so lost that her unhappy boy-husband would not publish his disgrace by trying to obtain a divorce. He parted from her within a month of the marriage, paying her well to keep the ghastly family secret. She was a vicious, ignorant woman, and as glad to return to her freedom as he was. So she went her way and he went his, and when she died he thought himself safe for ever. Now listen, Muriel. The first that Sir Henry knew of the birth of a child was twenty years later, when there appeared in every leading newspaper an advertisement for the marriage certificate of Henry Mallion and Elizabeth Hiley."

"And he took no notice—nor you?" asked Muriel.

Lady Diana smiled bitterly. "My child, we were on our honeymoon. It was sheer chance that brought an old English newspaper before us many months after. By that time my husband had told me everything. We set the lawyers and the police to work to find out the advertiser, and waited through the gaieties of our homecoming for the news they might bring us. Then we heard the

worst, that Sir Henry had a living son, and that he was seeking his rights."

Muriel's white brow was knitted attentively, but she gave no sign.

"We found him—the eldest son—the heir of Mallionhay, in prison awaiting his trial for robbery.

Muriel started and shivered, then hid her scared young face in her hands. Lady Diana pursued her advantage.

"Shall I tell you his story at length? No, perhaps it is too hideous. A childhood spent in the companionship of the outcasts of the earth; five years at a reformatory; then a sudden change to a life of unwholesome ease and indulgence. A foolish, philanthropic old lady took a fancy to the boy's handsome face, and befriended him, or intended to do so. What she did was to take him into her house as a protégé, and he was sharp enough to play his part to perfection. She became completely infatuated with him, gave him some sort of education, and furnished him with money, which he secretly spent in all manner of low pleasures in company with some of his old comrades who had found him out. It was she who tried to trace out his parentage, guided by some old letters his mother had left. Nothing might ever have come of them but for our inquiries. He wearied of his life with his protectress, and, not content with robbing her as he had done for years unsuspected, he decamped with all her valuables. The shock was too much for the old lady and she died."

Muriel moaned, her face still hidden.

"He was taken, tried, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Within six months after he had made his escape, learned by some means of our inquiries about him, and made his way here to see what terms he could extort. It was a daring move, and it answered. What could I do? His father was lying injured and helpless; it all rested with me. He had an ingenious plan for securing his safety, but it required money, and I gave it ungrudgingly. The police are convinced that Morris Hiley is dead and buried—mortally wounded in the act of escaping. He has cut himself completely adrift from his old self, and is safe even if I wished to betray him now. Now the matter must rest with Sir Henry. I have begged him to come forward, but he keeps silence—a silence full of menace for me, I feel. Muriel, speak. Say you will help me, you will stand by me!" pleaded the mother. It was a cry for aid and comfort, but Muriel gave neither.

"I cannot tell—I cannot think yet. I must hear him first."

Then the maid knocked at the door, and entering, brought to the bedside a large tray heaped with letters, parcels, telegrams of congratulation to the beautiful young heiress, bouquets and cards, and smilingly added her own good wishes. Muriel constrained herself to answer graciously, and mechanically opened envelope after envelope, hardly marking the contents. "For you, mother," she said, taking

up a telegram and placing it in Lady Diana's listless hand. The next minute, with a startled cry, Lady Diana sank beside her.

"From Mr. Serafton. He wants me to come at once; what can it mean?"

"The diamonds!" cried Muriel, springing up. "We must go, mother. Don't faint—there's time. Go!" to the maid. "Order the carriage at once, and come back and dress me as fast as you can. Mother, there's time. We shall be back before anyone misses us. I'll stand by you in *this*, come what may."

The girl's senses seemed to have returned with this second shock. She flung her arms round her mother and kissed her with sudden violence. It brought the blood back to Lady Diana's wan cheek and the warmth to her heart, and with the shadow of her old high courage she turned to face this unknown, last, and worst calamity.

The shutters of Mark Serafton's establishment were closed, and Lady Diana and her daughter found a policeman guarding the entrance. Mr. Serafton, wan and hollow-eyed in the half light, came forward to receive them.

"Your ladyship—this is most kind and condescending—I felt I must lose no time in informing you ——" he stammered. The man seemed ready to drop to the earth; some cruel shock had blanched his lips and shattered the usual grave composure of his bearing. "A most terrible thing has happened. I was myself the first to discover it."

"Don't waste words—I can guess the worst." Lady Diana's voice was steady, but sounded in her own ears hard and unnatural. She found herself wondering at her own calmness. "Tell me how it happened."

"You shall see for yourself. I have been advised to leave everything exactly as I found it when I came down earlier than usual this morning."

Lady Diana looked round her. The shop was still closed, as it has been said. The glass cases were empty of their contents. In a chair in one corner reposed the helpless figure of Solomon Daly, with whom two gentlemen seemed to be busy endeavouring to administer something in a glass much against their patient's will, a policeman looking stolidly on. The whole police force of Southbeach seemed to be concentrated at that point, for the superintendent was walking about, note-book in hand, and two armed officers stood on guard at the open door of the strong room.

"Let me go and see for myself," said Lady Diana, in a sort of desperation, impatient to realise the extent of the disaster; but the jeweller interposed.

"May I beg your ladyship?—the sight is too painful," and he endeavoured to stay her entrance to his violated stronghold.

"Let me pass! Come, Muriel!" and she drew her daughter forward.

The stronger light within seemed to dazzle and blind her. The shining crystal case swam before her, its contents glittering like the sparkles on a sunlit sea. She clasped her hands over her eyes, to steady them for a second, and then withdrew them. There, full before her, sparkling and intact, lay the Mallion diamonds!

She staggered back in the revulsion of feeling. Struggling for speech, she clutched Mr. Serafton's arm, mutely pointing forward. "Safe? They are safe! Then what did you mean?"

But Muriel rushed forward with a low cry.

There, at the foot of the case, just as he had fallen, just as they had found him, stark and stiff, that morning, his tools—the mute witnesses to his guilty purpose—strewed around him, the murderous steel in his belt, his eyes seeming to watch them with a fixed and glassy gleam through the half-closed lids, but dead, lay her enemy, her husband's son, the heir of Mallion.

Mr. Serafton was explaining and lamenting unheeded. "I recognised him, your ladyship. I was almost positive. I made sure he had left the place that evening, or I should have taken extra precautions. And then, his connection with the family—his acquaintance with Miss Dasent—I really didn't know what to think."

"How did it happen?" she asked, under her breath.

Mr. Serafton pointed, with a shaky hand, to the light above. "That killed him. The naked wires run just within the glass. He must have touched them with his arm in trying to reach the diamonds. In no other way is there the slightest danger. The death must have been painless and instantaneous."

She heard no more. She was but a woman, erring and weak, as we mortals are. Her foe—the curse of her life—lay dead at her feet. Later on, when she came to think of it, she would forgive him all the suffering he had caused her, fully and freely. Now, in the sudden release from suffering, she could only clasp her hands before her face, and from the depths of her soul give thanks to Heaven for this signal and unexpected salvation.

The rest of the story is to be found in the county paper.

It contains the inquest and police investigation, ending in nothing; a paragraph on the dangers of electric lighting; and an account of the coming-of-age ball at Mallionhay, and the splendid appearance of Lady Diana in the Mallion diamonds.

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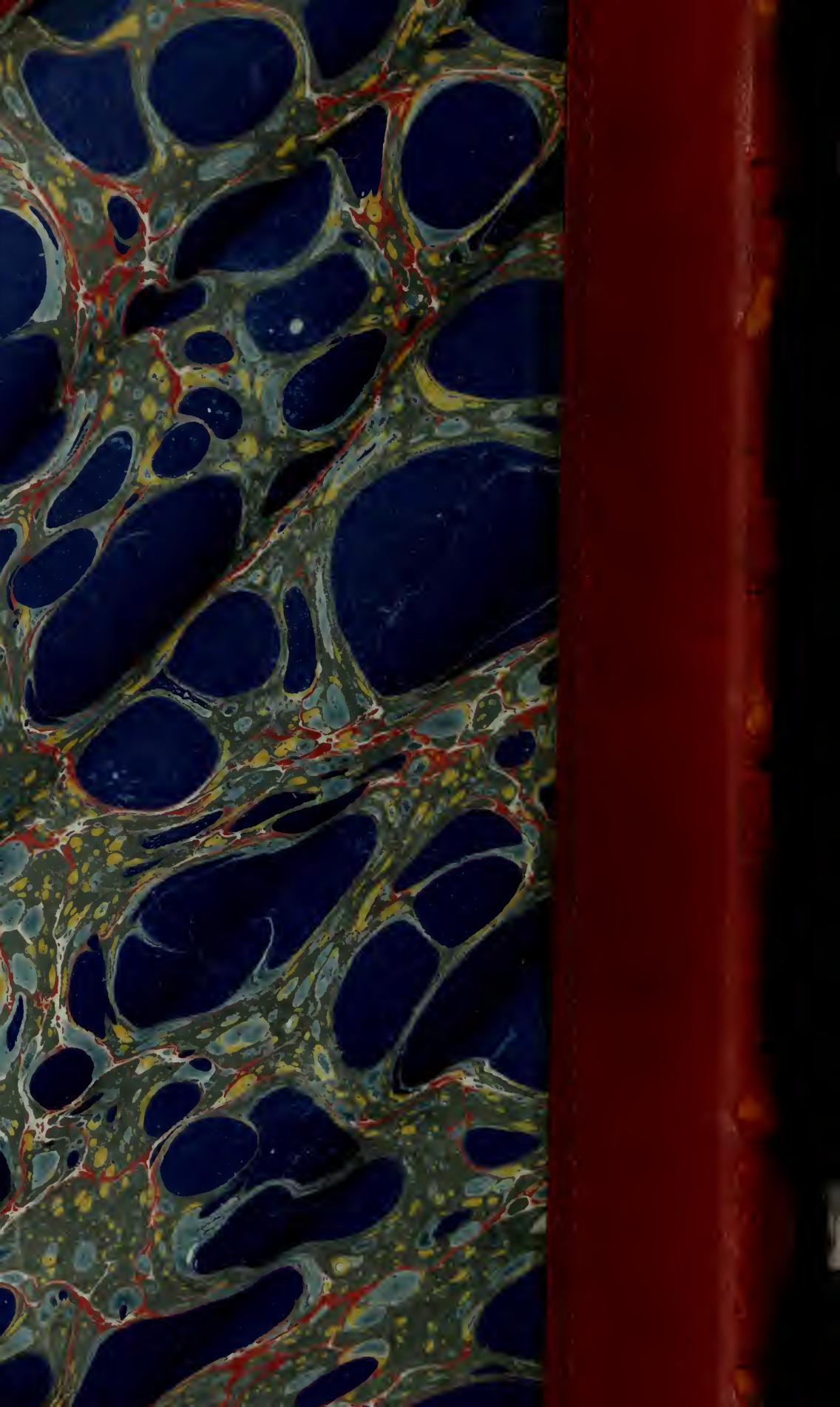
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